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OF ISRAEL



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# A DAUGHTER OF ISRAEL

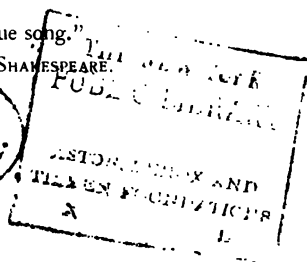
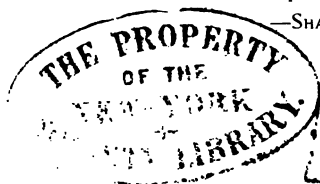
BY

ROSE PORTER

AUTHOR OF "SUMMER DRIFTWOOD," "FOUNDATIONS"  
"MY SON'S WIFE," ETC.

"The stretched metre of an antique song."

—SHAKESPEARE.



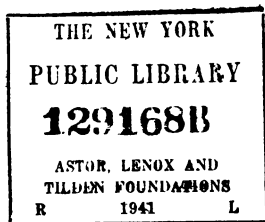
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## PREFATORY.

READ according to the precepts of Moses there is no sadder story in the Old Testament than Jephthah's vow and its sequel. But viewed in the light that streams from Calvary, we find considerations that modify the austere narrative and illumine it with the warmth and radiance of the gospel of Love. Nevertheless, in by-gone days poet and artist, in their frequent choice of this subject, almost invariably interpreted it with "their faces toward the desert, while they lingered on the threshold of Eden, in sight of the flaming sword." The reason is not far to seek : it was due to the old-time piety, which had so great a dread of offending God it feared to let the heart expand toward Him, and thus worshiped from afar with a humble reverence that veiled His tenderness and pity. All this has changed; we people of to-day are not afraid to let our hearts run out to meet His love. We know it will soften and sweeten them provided they

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### *Prefatory*

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also reach out after His power, which will strengthen them ; we know the recognition of the Lord's mercy as well as His severity is necessary if we desire a true conception of Him.

In reading the following story of Jephthah and his daughter, you will need to remember this ; and you must remember to look beyond the language of fiction, for only thus can you discover the hidden treasure of meaning that underlies the narrative, and proves, as Canon Westcott wrote, "that life is more than the sum of personal enjoyment and pain through which it finds expression, more than the length of days in which it is visible to human eyes, more than the fullness of means which reveals to us its power. All these pass away, but in the process of their vanishing a spiritual result has been fulfilled."

I would also remind my readers that in deciding upon a particular sequence of events, I can only say that such a sequence appears to me a probable one, not by any means that it is certain.

When writing from the result of independent thought on the impressions secured during a course of reading, it is not easy to

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### *Prefatory*

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acknowledge specific obligations, but I am consciously indebted to the help which I have gained from the writings of Canons Mozley, Westcott, and Farrar, Professor Plumptre, Alexander Maclaren, Cunningham Geikie, Matthew Henry, Phillips Brooks, Newman Smyth, and Professor H. A. Harper.

ROSE PORTER.

NEW HAVEN, 1897.



## CHAPTER I.

### THE YOUTH OZEM.

THE hour was the second before day-dawn. The moon had risen high in the heavens ; its light lay in a great flood on the grass. Dew fell like manna, the earth smelled sweetly. It was the coolest hour in the night and the most silent. But suddenly the stillness vibrated, a youth clad in princely garb came swiftly down one of the long ravines which opened from the mountain region of the country toward the valley of the Jordan and the Dead Sea. His step was free and stately for one so young. He was tall and broad-shouldered, but so exceedingly well formed his height seemed hardly greater than that of an ordinary man. Like Israel's shepherd king of a century later, "his limbs were like hinds' feet ; his arms sinewy, and so strong as to be able to break a bow of steel"; and "he was ruddy, and withal of a beautiful countenance, and goodly to look to"—of fair complexion with golden hair,—which is rare

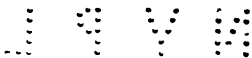
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among the swarthy, black-locked Easterns, —with lovely eyes, large and liquid.

Nevertheless, the strong manly figure of this youth—Ozem the Gileadite—the beauty of his eyes, and his auburn hair, were but lesser attractions compared to his bright intelligence and sweetness of disposition.

Although Ozem's father was a prince of Gilead the lad's early years had been spent in the calling of a shepherd, the ancient occupation of his race. But his active mind was not satisfied with the lowly demands of tending sheep and goats, and even in boyhood he had yielded to the impulse which led him to cast his thoughts into poetical forms, and to accompany his songs with the sweet strains of harp and pipe. Meanwhile no better school could have been found than the experiences connected with a shepherd's life for the development of decision of character and manly courage. Many a time a lion or a bear had come up from the reed-banks and thickets of the Jordan to the hill-pastures, to attack the sheepfolds, and though only armed with his sling and shepherd's staff, Ozem had defended his flock. Nor were these the



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only dangers that assailed him among the rocks and strongholds of the Judean hills, where his brave deeds had early gained him a name for courage among the men of his tribe. He was also well beloved by the women and children ; he was blithe of speech, he knew neither bitterness of heart nor word ; and for all his exceeding strength of body, for all his brilliancy of mind, he was proud and high to none—even those in the despised condition of servitude loved him and were eager to do his bidding.

The princes and people of Gilead knew this, hence he was chosen from among the young men of the tribe as the one best fitted to execute a mission which demanded courage and prudence, as well as physical endurance and swiftness of foot. Family feeling has always been a marked characteristic of the children of Israel, and the selection of Ozem for this important service gave general satisfaction as he was a direct descendant of "Jair, a Gileadite who judged Israel twenty and two years."

But enough of genealogy ; it is time to return to the youth, whose quick, even foot-fall on the hard earth of the much trodden



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mountain path had broken the hush of the morning stillness. As Ozem approached the border of the plain he halted, and for a moment he stood motionless, engaged in profound thought.

Responsibility is wont to speedily make a man of a youth, and during that moment a subtle change passed over Ozem's face. The grave thought and dignity of recognized manhood stirred his soul; his mind was alert with energy, courage, and a keen sense of his own personality. Self-hood had asserted itself. Henceforth the earth would be to him an earnest place, existence a most serious fact; henceforth "life would roll on, another, yet the same." The recognition of this imparted a new significance to every surrounding object and circumstance; even the silence of dawn had a new and spiritual meaning. The heavens and the firmament, the linked chorus of day and night were as a silent speech to which his soul listened. And then, as he looked toward the mountains of Moab there leaped into the eastern sky, not with the long twilight of northern lands, but with sudden splendor, "the sun, radiant as a bridegroom from the bridal chamber." The rising of

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the sun, the herald of the new day, was straightway followed by the sound and stir of animate life. Ozem heard the lowing of bulls and oxen, the bleating of flocks, and the confused murmur of the voices of shepherds and herdsmen. Thus he knew he was not far from the enemy's camp, "where the children of Ammon were gathered together in Gilead." This knowledge caused Ozem to feel the great need of haste in delivering the message which he had been commissioned to convey to the outcast chieftain, Jephthah, the Gileadite.

## CHAPTER II.

### JEPHTHAH THE GILEADITE.

THERE are but faint incidental traces of the early life of this man, Jephthah, to whom Ozem was sent by the elders of Gilead.

But perhaps the fact that his story begins with the announcement that "he was a mighty man of valor" tells more than pages of the missing biography of his childhood. There is also a hint of one of the domestic tragedies—so common among the children of Israel—in the brief statement "he was the son of a strange woman; and Gilead begat Jephthah, and Gilead's wife bore him sons, and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, 'Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house, for thou art the son of a strange woman.'"

This woman, Jephthah's mother, was an Ishmaelite, the people of Gilead said. Be this as it may, certain it is, by nature Jephthah was high-spirited, self-willed and im-

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patient of restraint, and he early became enamored of the excitement of border life. Doubtless as a child this taste was fostered by listening at the watch-fires of his father's herdsmen to their stories of feuds and encounters with hostile neighbors at the wells, and with the freebooters of the desert. Meanwhile the chase of the gazelle, the wild goat, and the more dangerous pursuit of the bear or the leopard inured him in youth to exertion and adventure. Indeed his aptest emblem was "the wild ass of the desert, that no man can tame, and that scorns the multitude of the city and delights in the far-off pastures of the wilderness." Hence when driven from his father's house by his brethren he betook himself to a wild marauding life. Naturally the open sweep of mountain and plain favored his desire for independence, while his adventurous spirit was stimulated by constant exposure to danger from hostile tribes and beasts of prey. It forced him also to depend on the chase for his living. This state of things combined with a sense of the injustice of his banishment kept Jephthah for years aloof from mankind save for intercourse with the people of his own special band,

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"the companions who went out with him," over whom he ruled as chief. They were a mixed company, but despite diversity of character, sex and age, all were united in loyal devotion to Jephthah, and his daughter, Elisheba.

This daughter, "his only child," was little more than an infant when Jephthah fled from Gilead to the land of Tob, an event which occurred nineteen years before the time of which this record tells. During Elisheba's babyhood she had been tenderly cared for by her faithful nurse, Naomi, to whom Jephthah's young wife had entrusted the helpless babe, whose earthly life began as the mother's ended.

When the little Elisheba was about eight years old Jephthah decided that the time had come when for her sake he must abandon his roving career, and he and his followers adopted, in a measure, the simple shepherd life to which he had been reared. But the wilder side of Ishmaelite nature was still strong in the exiled man, the shepherd was always subordinate to the warrior, and he and his men speedily came to act as a kind of frontier-guard against southern Bedouins and western Philistines, who were

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the enemies of the sheep farmers of the border, and too weak to protect themselves.

The effect of such a life evolved the qualities essential in a leader of men ; it taught Jephthah self-command, forbearance, promptitude and patience, valor and gentleness, for always there was Elisheba, the idol of his love, the joy of his heart to think of. It won him a position, too, as a recognized defender of the defenseless, and it gathered around him an increased force of men devoted to him by the enthusiastic attachment bred from common dangers and the companionship of many a day's march and nightly encampment round the glimmering watch-fires beneath the lucid stars.

Jephthah's character was calculated to command respect ; he was upright and just, brave and true, but the school of his upbringing had been hard, and contact with Moab and Ammon, and knowledge of their worship of sanguinary gods had given him a creed in which zeal for God was darkly mingled with heathen ideas borrowed from Chemosh. At the same time he had a truer conception than was usual among the Gileadites of the profound meaning of the law the Lord spake unto Moses, commanding,

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"Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, thou shalt not avenge nor bear any grudge against the children of thy people." Thus although a silent, self-contained man, austere and often proud and haughty in manner, Jephthah possessed a certain magnanimity of heart, willing to forgive those who had injured him. This was proved by his prompt obedience to one of those prophetic dreams, which in the early dawn of history were regarded as sacred intimations of the Divine will not to be lightly set aside.

It was during the night that followed the youth Ozem's departure from Mizpeh, that Jephthah was thus warned in his sleep of some impending event of importance by a dream twice repeated. This dream emphasized recall to his tribe; it transported him to his father's house, where his presence was needed to rescue his kindred from peril. The second time it occurred he awoke with a start, as though in response to a voice bidding him hasten to the border of the plain. The repeated vision—for it was tangible as sight—took so strong a hold on his imagination that without lingering to reflect, or reason about it, he arose from his couch, and, saying no word to the inmates

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of his dwelling, passed quietly out into the silent night.

The heavens were ablaze with stars, the earth shimmering in moonlight, and the glory did not fade from earth or sky until Jephthah was far on his way toward the spot which Ozem had reached just before the dawn of day.



## CHAPTER III.

### THE SUMMONS.

JEPHTHAH'S dream was a natural outcome of his waking thoughts. More than once within a few days rumors had reached him of the distress the people of Gilead were in owing to the Amorites' invasion of their country. He had heard of the proclamation the heathen host had issued, bidding the apostate children of Israel to halt, no longer wavering between allegiance to Baal or Jehovah. Already he knew that altars of Baal or Ashtaroth smoked "upon the high mountains, and upon the hills and under green trees," while Baal's black-robed priests took tithes and offerings in every town. And when the idol-feasts were held, when the incense rose high in the evening air, full well Jephthah knew men lost their manhood, and scoffers perverted judgment, while the wine-cup sparkled with the crimson juice of grapes, and thrilled the quick pulse of youth with warm desire, which swells the voice of song,

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and bids the feet move to music in exulting dance that stirs the lower nature. He had seen this poison at its work; he had watched a soul lose calmness and strength, "rising high to sink down low, all brutish in the abyss when man forgets his God."

As Jephthah trod the lonely mountain path his heart beat with eager zeal to free the land of his fathers from these haters of Israel's God. But how could he, an outcast, accomplish this mighty task? He was so absorbed in striving to solve this question he paid no heed to the flight of time, and not until he reached the border of the plain did he realize that the night was over and gone, the hour of sunrise had come. And then he caught sight of Ozem's prostrate figure, and at the sight his heart gave a great leap, for he remembered his dream.

To Ozem, sunrise had from childhood been a silent call to prayer; thus before starting on his onward way he had bowed low, repeating in a half-audible voice the form of morning consecration familiar to every true son of Abraham. When his devotions were concluded he stood alert and ready, like an athlete, impatient for the sig-

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nal which bids him start on the race. As he stood thus he scanned with an earnest gaze the open plain, as though looking for some expected comer from the border land. And yet Ozem had no such expectation, and he started with surprise as he beheld an heroic figure coming toward him with quick, majestic step.

Instinctively Ozem knew this tall, dark man could be none other than Jephthah, the exile, whom he had been sent forth to seek. Nearer approach confirmed the fact; it revealed the features as well as the figure the elders had described.

In appearance Jephthah was indeed imposing and striking. His long black hair flowed around him like a mantle, the dark locks were grizzled about the temples, where they clustered in rings, that shone in the sunlight like wrought iron. His forehead was high and smooth, his lips full and red, his complexion bronze and swarthy; the glance of his fiery black eyes—which shone from beneath shaggy brows—was steady, wide-open, and fearless. For a moment their penetrating gaze intimidated Ozem, and he trembled, as he bent low in humble obeisance before the haughty chieftain.

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It would be difficult to picture a more striking contrast than the one presented by the two men as they stood face to face in the clear light of the early morning. The one, radiant with his ruddy beauty, changeful eyes, and lithe form; the other, dark, gaunt, a giant in strength and stature; the one full of earnest aspiration and joyous hope, loving and beloved; the other—save for affection for his daughter—gloomy and embittered by injustice and on the watch for lurking enemies. But although the difference in outward appearance and in spirit was so great, they were both loyal to their nation, and this gave Ozem courage to deliver the elders' message, while it made Jephthah calm and strong to listen to the summons which bade him meet a delegation from his tribe the next day, at break of dawn, at a secluded spot midway between his eyrie among the hills and Mount Mizpeh.

Ozem possessed rare tact as a messenger; he stated his errand in few words. It was sufficient to add that "the children of Ammon had made war against Israel, and had passed over Jordan to fight them, so that Israel was sore distressed, and had put away the strange gods from among them,

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and repented of their evil ways, and in this their time of tribulation had said unto the Lord, 'We have sinned, do Thou whatsoever seemeth good unto Thee, deliver us only, we pray Thee, from the hands of our enemies.'"

Having early learned that rule meant service, Ozem felt a glow of conscious power in uniting service with obedience. He had, however, slight curiosity about details; in fact, he was somewhat indifferent to the full import of the message he had been commanded to deliver, and he was unable to estimate the effect it and the recital of Israel's condition had on Jephthah's already excited mind. Nevertheless, as he continued to tell how, "when the people repented, and served the Lord, His soul was grieved for their misery," the Hebrew youth's own heart was so moved by the thought of the Lord's mercy—which he believed would speedily be vouchsafed his nation—he forgot for a moment the nearness of the hostile camp, and he lifted up his voice in a tone soft and sweet, yet clear and far-reaching as the note of a bell, as he sang the inspiring words so dear to Israel. "The Lord is my strength, and He is be-

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come my salvation. He is my God, my father's God, and I will exalt Him. The Lord shall reign for ever and ever."

As the words rang out on the still air Jephthah, by a hasty sign, hushed the song of praise, and a silence fell between the two men. During it they searched with anxious looks the olive wood to make sure no listener lurked within its shadow. When satisfied that they were still alone, Ozem again bowed himself to the ground before Jephthah, and repeated a special message sent the chieftain by his half-brother, Micah. As Jephthah heard the affectionate words his swarthy face grew a shade darker, the blood mounted to his cheeks, and for a moment a rush of early memories blotted out the bitter years of his banishment. Even when he recalled them, Micah was not included in his resentment, for Micah had always been friendly, and had striven to revoke the sentence of exile. But this was not the time to indulge in recollections, and Jephthah thrust them aside, and his voice was firm and decisive as the stroke of an axe, as he said to Ozem: "Arise, I will obey the summons of the elders."

At these words Ozem rose from his lowly

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posture, and standing with uncovered head, he listened to Jephthah's command which bade him return to the elders with the assurance of assent, and to remain with them until the chieftain joined them the next day at the appointed hour and spot.

And then, suddenly as he had appeared, Jephthah passed swiftly across the narrow strip of open land that separated the plain from the opposite hillside, and in a moment he was entirely hidden by the interlacing of tree boughs that hung heavy with leafage and ripening fruit.

After the chieftain's departure Ozem lingered only long enough to slip his hand into the pouch hanging from his belt, from which he drew forth a handful of parched corn; this, and a cluster of ripe figs plucked from a neighboring tree, sufficed for the lad's simple morning meal.

## CHAPTER IV.

### FATHER AND DAUGHTER.

AS Jephthah neared home he smiled at the thought that his daughter, Elisheba, would be watching for his return. He was not mistaken, in truth she had been since early morning, when she had accompanied the women to the well at the entrance of the glen, where they watered their flocks at dawn, and again toward the end of the day.

Except for companionship with her father Elisheba was wonted to a somewhat solitary life, and she had no sense of loneliness, as seated on the upper step of the rock-hewn stones that led to the water, she awaited his return.

This well, like most of the fountains in the East, was in a wady, hence the need of the steps, which were half hidden by the tall grass and flowers surrounding the oozy bed of the brook, which flowed into a swift-stream at the base of the western hill.

Although Elisheba inclined to reflection,



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and her mind had been busy with grave thoughts, they left no shadow on either heart or countenance, as, in response to her father's step, she hastened to lower her pitcher into the cool, sparkling water, that she might be ready to offer him the refreshing draught, which was never so welcome to Jephthah as when proffered by his daughter.

Elisheba made a lovely picture as she stood with the pitcher on her shoulder, and the light of expectancy shining in her dark eyes. The memory of it stayed with Jephthah down to old age; it went with him to the verge of the grave. Did it meet him beyond the grave?

Save for the jewels that adorned her forehead, neck, arms, and slender ankles—and which denoted her rank as a chieftain's daughter—Elisheba's attire was most simple. Yet her robe was of finer texture than the rough garments of goat's hair commonly worn by her people. It was colored also by an eastern dye of deep blue, and girded by a twisted cord of pale yellow.

Her dark hair hung loose, its raven blackness was like her father's, so were her full red lips, which were wreathed with smiles,

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as in obedience to his signal she let the water-jug down on to her hand, holding it with easy grace as he bent his tall figure and quenched his thirst. This done, the weary man sat down on the flat stone of the upper step, and Elisheba knelt by his side and laid her head on his knee, while his hand smoothed her clustering ringlets. Never did a father gaze on a lovelier daughter than this girl, for whom the years of mortal existence counted but nineteen summers. Looking at her, Jephthah almost forgot his dream, and Ozem, and the message from the elders. Her eyes, as they met his fond gaze, shone like stars, and something in their expression strangely thrilled the heart of the strong man. For the first time in her life she reminded him of his wife, the love of his youth, whom the angels had borne to Abraham's bosom when the girl was but a wailing infant.

He had never meant to tell Elisheba of his early joy, and its sequel of bitter grief, until she was on the eve of becoming the bride of some noble, princely youth, but suddenly, almost without conscious volition, his lips gave utterance to the thought of his heart, and he told the listening maiden

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of her young mother, who was "a woman of good understanding, and of a beautiful countenance." And then he told of the tomb where the dear body slept in the land of Gilead, where he had purchased a field and sepulchre near his brother Micah's vineyard, and where he too expected to rest after life's conflict; for while,—until his recent meeting with Ozem,—Jephthah had for years considered himself a stranger on the earth, a man banished from his father's household, he had always, except for a brief season of apostasy, been strong in his adherence to the faith of Abraham, which permitted no doubt that after mortal death he would be "gathered to his fathers."

Elisheba listened to her father with rapt attention. Her heart had ever clung to him with the ardent devotion of an earnest, loving nature, and his words only served to deepen her love, and more than ever he seemed to combine a mother's tenderness with a father's strength. As he ended the tale his hands continued to stray caressingly over Elisheba's bowed head, her shoulder, and arms. The silence about them was sweet as music; not a sound disturbed it, save a white owl flitting among the tree

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boughs, and the faint, far-off whinnying of an ass that had lost her foal.

Jephthah felt a strange unwillingness to shadow that happy hour by telling his daughter of the sudden change in the circumstances of his life, and thus in hers; and he made no mention of his meeting with Ozem, nor of the elders' message, and his anticipated departure. And when he spoke it was to utter the benediction familiar to every Hebrew child whose parents adhered to the faith of Israel: "The Lord bless thee and keep thee, the Lord make His face to shine upon thee and give thee light."

In reply, Elisheba half rose from her kneeling posture and cast her arms about her father, and her whispered words of love seemed to him sweeter than any sound he had ever heard.

And then father and daughter turned homeward, making a path through the tangled growth of figs, vines, pomegranates, and tall grasses that well-nigh barred the entrance to the glen, and at every step they trod on marigolds, lilies, and wild roses.

From this woody, flower-carpeted way they passed into a stretch of broad sunshine, dappled with the shadows of the

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leaves on the near by trees, which moved gently in the clear, fresh air, yet not brisk enough to be called a wind.

Simon—a soldier and Jephthah's trusted friend—met them half way up the glen, and in obedience to the chieftain's command he hastened on in advance to sound the signal that called the band to assemble for council. The appointed place of rendezvous was a plain some quarter of a mile in breadth, and girded around by savage cliffs, and only reached by a narrow, rocky defile that opened from the western hillside.

Jephthah's order to Simon was the first intimation Elisheba had that anything unusual had occurred during her father's absence. But although eager to know the import of the summons to council, she asked no question. She could trust her father to tell whenever and whatever he wished her to know. Nevertheless, her patience was well tested, for before joining Simon and his companions Jephthah tarried to partake of the mid-day meal which Naomi was busy preparing, when he and Elisheba entered their dwelling. It was a simple home, in which modest frugality ruled. Naomi was

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their only servant; their ordinary food was bread, olives, and figs, with milk, and an occasional cheese from the flocks which found pasturage on the rough hillsides and waste places, where they grazed from dawn until sunset. The clothing worn by Jephthah and his followers was also of the simplest, coarse and strong, and much of it made by Naomi, whose skill excelled the women of the band in the spinning of the goat's hair of which their garments were made, save those worn by Elisheba. In her work Naomi used no spindle; she merely fastened the strands to a stone, which was twirled around until they were sufficiently twisted and then wound up into a ball, this process being repeated over and over.

Jephthah's usual costume was a loose shirt of this fabric, bound to his person by a girdle of cloth or leather, and a woolen abá or cloak, and his dress was a type of that of his people. After the meal, which was eaten in silence, he made a few preparations for departure, but he added nothing to the simplicity of his attire. And yet he was in the habit of assuming the dress of a petty prince or sheik when he went among other tribes. But now, pride determined

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the haughty man to appear before the elders of Gilead in his customary rough abá and coarse garments, though they were little better than the garb of a wayfarer. Had they not sent him forth as an outcast and alien, and wherein did his position now differ? Thus he said to himself; and while in his secret heart he divined the import of Ozem's message, he was not a man inclined to outwardly anticipate honor. Then, too, the extremity of his emotion held him back from display, as it kept him silent to Elisheba until necessity forced him to speak.

When Jephthah's arrangements were completed, he bade Naomi and his daughter come with him to the gray-weathered heap of stone that marked the centre of the secluded plain. Evidently the heap denoted the site of some forsaken altar. Already dark-visaged men were grouped about it, while their wives and children fringed the outer edge of the circle. The faces of the entire company were alert with curiosity, and in some cases eager, with an expression of anxiety. But Jephthah's control was so absolute, not one of those bold, fearless men demanded an explanation of this sudden

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interruption in their day's work, when in the sheltered valley the fields were already white for the harvest.

And when at last Jephthah told them of his meeting with Ozem, and that in reply to a summons from the elders he had promised to return to the land of Gilead, alone and unarmed, only one voice was raised in remonstrance. But that voice was more powerful in its influence over the self-reliant man than the plea of a hundred other voices, and the people realized this, for it was Jephthah's daughter who spoke. And while they knew their chief had a will strong as the cedars of Lebanon, they also knew that will was wont to be pliant as yielding wax before the slightest wish of his daughter, who was dearer to him than his own life, and "fair, sweet, and pleasant for his eyes to behold." Hence when Elisheba spoke the hush deepened, and when she ceased the song of birds in the far-off woods sounded close and loud; the hum of bees, the chirp of insects, the flitting to and fro of grasshoppers among the grain and yellowing corn could be distinctly heard. They could hear, too, the rustling of the rye as it hung gray and heavy, ready



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to be cut, for the weather had been bright and warm.

Although the people were so confident of Elisheba's power, her words did not change her father's purpose; his soul had heard a message from the Lord, and go he must. For a moment Elisheba's heart was sore over this decision. She bowed her head and wept; she hid her face in the tall grass and sweet fern. And then her wonted courage revived; she spanned the farewell with a hope of speedy return, and when the parting time came she bade her father "God-speed." She told how she would wait and watch for his home-coming. She asked permission to be the first to meet him when he returned victorious over all his enemies. And the future is so closely veiled neither father nor daughter caught so much as a glint of the profound importance of Elisheba's request. In truth they merely thought they were parting for a brief separation. And while Elisheba had a thought of a triumphant return, while she used the words "victorious over all enemies," she was as ignorant as a child of the full significance of an enemy. Victory was to her artless mind only as

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an added sunlight gathering an increase of sunshine about her father.

Jephthah, of course, was not thus ignorant; but although he knew his future was beset with danger, he fully expected to return to Elisheba and his followers before he engaged in conflict with the children of Ammon. Hence as he granted Elish-e-ba's wish he smiled, and for the second time within an hour her voice sounded to him sweeter than any sound he had ever heard. And then she sent him away with song, and the melody of timbrel and harp, as was the custom of her people. She went with him as far as the first steep descent of the road that led toward the plain; she watched his tall figure until he came "down by the covert hill," when he turned, looked back, and waved his hand in farewell.

In reply to that mute signal of love Elish-e-ba lifted up her voice, and sang the words that so often, since Moses first uttered them, had inspired the people of Israel with courage: "Behold, publish the name of the Lord, His work is perfect, a God of truth, without iniquity, just and right is He."

Many heard that song; many long remem-

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bered that hour, and how, as Elisheba turned homeward, a shadow fell across her path. A sudden storm had gathered, echoing thunder peals reverberated among the hills, lurid lightning rent the clouds.

Almost as suddenly as it came the storm was over, spent and transient; sunshine streamed out again from the softened blue over a freshened world; every rain-drop on the leaves and grass-blades twinkled with diamond brightness.

Was it an emblem of Elisheba's future?

## CHAPTER V.

### THE OUTCAST'S EYRIE.

THE Hebrew maiden paid slight heed to the brief storm. With a step light and swift as a gazelle, she sped up the narrow defile that led to the cluster of houses that were scattered about the valley in the hills, the spot she called home.

These houses were perishable structures, built mostly of round stones and mud, and in many cases half underground. Jephthah's dwelling, however, was more imposing. It stood somewhat apart and near the southern boundary of the valley. The walls were neatly plastered with fine cement and flat pebbles from the brook, and they were ornamented in places with inserted fragments of pottery of mosaic patterns. As Elisheba entered the dwelling she was unconscious of the anxious gaze with which Naomi regarded her; she did not know of the danger that threatened her father as he passed across the border land

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of the enemy's encampment, nor that the road he must traverse led along the southwestern shore of the Dead Sea and, while perfectly flat, was formed of salt-mud and intersected by quicksands. But Naomi knew this, and so did Simon and Jephthah, for both men were as familiar with that road as they were with the face of the heaven now blazing above them in clearer brightness because of the storm. They knew, too, that enemies, "ready to breathe out cruelty," were on the watch for all comers from the hills, and that "pitfalls and snares" skulked among the crags and tangled underwood which stretched to the shore of the sea, and that traps were ready to close over unsuspecting travelers as they crossed the quicksands, while even the plain beyond was an inhospitable place. But this knowledge in no wise daunted Jephthah. Fear was an emotion he had never felt, save for his daughter. As he thought of the fate that might await her if he perished or fell into the hands of "the children of Ammon," the color faded for a moment from his cheek, the flash of his dark eyes grew dim, his brow clouded, and his heart beat quick. He was conscious of a sudden

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impulse to cast aside the elders' message of recall as a dry leaf the winds waft over hill and valley.

It was only a passing emotion; he straightway banished it from his mind. No, not even love for Elisheba, his sweet darling, would he allow to tempt him to become recreant to the grave duties, and the lofty purpose of freeing his land from the presence of its foes and the worship of false gods. And yet, he was a father !

After that momentary conflict between duty and affection, Jephthah turned to Simon—it was just before they parted—and he plead with the honest soldier, as only a parent can, to guard the maiden as the “apple of his eye.”

According to the custom of the times, the chieftain's simplest words were clothed in imagery, and colored by the scenes and life which he knew. Simon understood this language; to him, as to Jephthah, enemies were “as lions in ambush, crouching beasts, ready to spring upon harmless prey.” Elisheba was “a timid bird,” “a lily among thorns,” and the Lord Jehovah, the Holy One, “a Rock and Fortress, a Strong Tower.” This expression of vehement emotion

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was unlike Jephthah, nevertheless Simon received it in passive silence.

In fact, deeds, rather than words, were wont to be the index to the character of the plain, blunt soldier, who was in no way raised by any visible sign above the average of his profession, and the firm clasp of his vigorous right hand was a sufficient reply to satisfy Jephthah; it gave as sure a promise of protection as any amount of verbal protestation. The chieftain knew, too, that Simon loved Elisheba as the strong love the tender, and that although ordinarily he was stern in word and look, toward the girl he was always gentle in speech and action.

Jephthah also realized that Elisheba would heed Simon's slightest wish; for although she was very young at the time of her father's banishment, her earliest recollections were associated with Simon, and she always retained, and often spoke of two vivid impressions of the journey that followed their exile in which the stalwart soldier filled a foremost place. The first of these memories was of great weariness, and then of rest in Simon's strong arms, as he carried her on his shoulder during the last hours of the toilsome ascent of the steep

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mountain road. It was a common practice of the children of Israel to travel thus at night during the summer, and it so happened on the night which lived in Elisheba's memory, the moon was at the full and shining gloriously in the sky, as the band of outcasts, led by Jephthah, wound their way up the rugged path, while the still midnight air of the lofty region softened the rough edge of the men's stentorian voices into a melody which rang out full and strong, waking the sleeping echoes far and wide among the rocky defiles and woody ravines. The second early memory was of the sound of Simon's voice, as he led the earnest-hearted men and women of the company as they united in chanting praise to the Lord of Israel. Not even her father's deep bass had equaled Simon's solemn intoning of strain after strain from the song of Moses. And, influence is such a subtle power, taking hold of heart and mind when least expected Simon, by the repetition of the lofty words by which he sought to cheer the flagging zeal of his companions, had all unconsciously kindled a spark of faith and courage in the soul of the child whose soft cheek nestled close to his own.



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This spark—a mere glint at first—was never extinguished in Elisheba's heart. It shone brighter and brighter as year succeeded year, until its radiance illumined the darkness that encompassed her own life, and the lives of those she loved best, with a clear out-shining hope, that was merged at last in the full glory of the consuming fire of God's Love.

Elisheba was not the only one Simon influenced. Although he was essentially a soldier, whose views were apt to be limited to the solving of complicated questions by a downright blow of the sword in place of argument, the purity of his life, combined with his bravery, had soon won for him general confidence and respect among Jephthah's followers. He had proved, also, a most efficient guide during the early days of exile. He knew the Judean hill country and the land of Tob as well as a scholar knows the pages of a well-read book, and thus he was the one who led to the secluded retreat where the weary wanderers had found a safe refuge. At first they only thought to bivouack for a brief time, but the advantages the location offered were so many it soon became a rallying spot, and

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an abiding-place later on, for the women and children, and the men who were content to exchange their roving life for the quiet occupations connected with tillage and the tending of flocks and herds. Thus it happened for years they sowed and reaped, planted and builded in this valley. It was a mile or more in breadth, it sloped gently down toward the western shore of the Dead Sea, and it was girded around by rugged cliffs which on the north side jutted out in a bold headland to the water's edge. The southern boundary was marked by the stream already mentioned, which fed the well, that was so necessary a part of a shepherd's possessions. This stream found its rise high up on the hills, where a fountain sparkled and fell to the flat below in long slender threads, while maiden-hair fern and brakes half-concealed the moss and lichen-covered rocks between which the torrent fell. Every surrounding object proclaimed this valley a spot which needed but little care and industry to make it an earthly paradise. No wonder as the years came and went each one had shut down tighter on the old life behind Jephthah, until in a way, he became almost reconciled to his exile.

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Meanwhile his daughter had passed from childhood into maidenhood, remaining, however, always a child in the sweet child likeness, which is as unlike childishness as sentiment is unlike sentimentality. This was due partly to her natural loveliness of character, and partly to the simplicity of her life.

## CHAPTER VI.

### LOOKING BACKWARD.

AMONG the men of Jephthah's band Simon was the only one who knew of a certain dark chapter in his chieftain's history. Hence he understood as his companions could not Jephthah's prompt response to the summons which bade him meet the elders of his tribe. And Simon was not mistaken in his interpretation of his chieftain's obedience, for Jephthah did regard his recall as an assurance of the Lord's pardon, which his soul had longed for years to receive. For while long ago repentance had succeeded that brief period of yielding to temptation, he had never ceased to feel remorse; he had never forgotten the evil rites and idol feasts in which he, a son of Israel, had once consented to take part. He remembered every detail of those hours during which he had bowed his knee at Moloch's shrine; he remembered the spell the worship of the false gods had cast over his soul, and how nearly crimes of

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sense, as well as crimes of spirit, had tainted his heart and life. He realized that he had, indeed, trod the evil path which led to the brink of a fearful gulf, from which he had started back before he had fully seen the bottom of the abyss; he knew all that saved him was a sudden thought of the God of Abraham, and Isaac, and of Jacob. These memories, just as he was about to encounter a new and very different experience, led Jephthah to crave, before he met the elders in counsel, a brief time of solitary communion with Jehovah.

He represented that hour "the true and highest type of a troubled soul's fellowship with God, when the black fear and sense of weakness is inclosed in a golden ring of happy trust." For he felt that if the name of God be first upon his lips he could meet his own weakness, his foes, and his fears without losing his hold on the Lord's promised help in time of need.

To reach the retired spot he had in mind he turned aside from the public road and climbed the steep spur of the height which overlooked the valley among the lesser hills where, like an oasis in the midst of sterile waste, nestled the verdant plateau he had

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learned to call home. The summit of this height was marked by an altar to the heathen gods, and alongside of it the sharp-pointed stone symbols of Baal had been raised.

Jephthah knew the place all too well; it was here he had, in that long bygone time, wavered between faith in Jehovah and worship of Baal. He stood pale and dismayed when confronted by the very object which had witnessed his brief apostasy. And though he was a man of valor, he bowed himself and crouched on the ground, and wept aloud, while like the people of his tribe—of whom Ozem had told—he besought the Lord for “deliverance from all his transgressions.”

The mystery of such hours of repentance and struggle must ever remain a secret between God and the individual's soul, but the calmness that is wont to follow is open to observation. In Jephthah's heart this calm was as different from the stony calm which had preceded it “as the peace after a storm, when all the world sleeps, is different from the boding stillness when the slow thunder-clouds grow livid in the horizon.” For during that hour ambition and the desire to rule, which were strong traits in

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Jephthah's character, retreated, and he discovered that it is only remorse that has power to sap manly vigor; he saw that the true object of repentance is steadfast pursuit of righteousness whenever, and however, the work of the Lord calls; and what work so mighty and glorious as the deliverance of the Lord's chosen people? It was thus he asked himself, as flushed with courage and zeal he lifted his face to the clear sky, and cried to Heaven for vengeance on the enemies of Israel. For, although doubtless this was the hour when the Bible record tells us "the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah," in his heart there was as yet but slight thought of pitying love. He had been trained to smite and slay the haters of his God, and to use for that purpose tongue, or hand, or sword, as he saw fittest. Even love for Elisheba receded before his enthusiasm; his pride of manhood almost rebelled against its gentle influence; it seemed base cowardice to consider the thought of casting away all that a warrior holds most precious for the sake of a maiden. And yet, yet again, as he had done, when he parted from Simon, he clenched his hands in anguish as imagination—that

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swiftest of all artists—pictured the girl, the treasure of his heart, now so fair, so bright, so joyous in song, so light of heart, so graceful in every motion, compelled to join—as she might be if bereft of his protecting care—in guilty dance to Ashtaroth in shadowy groves by pale moonlight, or defiled by enforced worship at Moloch's shrine. The simple truth is, during that halt upon the mountain height, Jephthah's emotions were a mingling of good and evil. In part, his aspirations were lofty and imbued with a desire for the glory of God and the emancipation of his people. And then, just when good seemed uppermost, the spirit of evil, ever ready to attack the heart of man at its weakest point, glided in. It was as though for a time two persons struggled in him. Ambition asserted its claim, and its alluring flame burned brightly; by nature he inclined to over-presumption, hence an unwarranted self-confidence was rooted deep in his heart, and before he reached the plain pride and thoughts of self-aggrandizement had cast a shadow over the purity of his purpose.

Still, there was an added dignity in his demeanor as he set forth on his way—there



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always is after a soul has held communion with the best that is in him, for that best is a part of the God who made man in His likeness.

It was time he hastened; the sun was long past the zenith; the light that stretched like a sea of burnished gold across the plain already reached far up the mountain-side. He needed to speed on with no delay if he were to arrive at Micah's home before night settled down over the world. Ozem had been explicit in his directions as to the turn in the road which led by a secluded path to the entrance of Micah's vineyard, but Jephthah was so absorbed in thought he missed the way, and in his desire to avoid notice he made no effort to overtake and ask direction from two men traveling slowly along the public highroad—one on foot, the other mounted on a sleek, well-fed white ass, bedecked with a costly carpet, or saddle, on which the rider sat with an ease that proclaimed him to be one of the well-to-do men of Gilead.

Then, too, the soft, mellow, violet haze of even-tide was so infused with the golden shimmer of sunset, Jephthah's eyes were dazzled, and even had he been more ob-

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servant he would have failed to recognize that the rider was none other than his half-brother Micah, who, by the way, had started to meet Jephthah immediately after Ozem's return with tidings of the chieftain's consent to confer with the elders. Jephthah's failure to follow the direct route disappointed Micah's kind plan, and as the day declined he had turned homeward, that he might be ready with a welcome if the chieftain approached his home by the way of the hills, rather than the plain. When at last Jephthah arrived, the short eastern twilight had waned; silvery rays of the rising moon were lighting up the landscape. The meeting of these long-parted brothers was fraught with deep feeling, and as Micah advanced Jephthah, despite his natural reserve, "fell on his neck and wept much and long." And Micah was hardly less overcome as he returned the embrace, murmuring meanwhile words of warmest welcome. Jephthah was the first to regain composure; and as he lifted his bowed head from Micah's shoulder, and relaxed the clasp of his arms, they gazed long and earnestly at one another; and then, arm in arm, they entered the house. They were met by a Hebrew lad

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- bearing water for washing the feet of the wayworn chief. To Jephthah this refreshment was most grateful after the dust and heat of the walk across the sandy plain and the climb up the steep hill-path; the evening meal of barley-cakes and honey in the comb was no less acceptable. After partaking of it the brothers sat long in the entrance
- of the house, which was built under the over-spreading branches of a noble tamarisk. Strange to say, although they were on the eve of events of profound importance to themselves and their tribe, their speech was of the days of their youth, rather than of the stirring events of the present. At last they separated, but it was not until the position of the stars revealed that it was nearing midnight, and long past the hour when the men of Israel were wont to seek rest after the day's toil.

## CHAPTER VII.

### MEETING THE ELDERS.

**H**ARDLY more than a faint glimmer of the new day lit up the eastern sky when Jephthah awoke. Micah was already astir, and with no delay the morning devotions were observed; they were followed by a meal simple as that of the preceding evening. Then the brothers passed out of the house and around to the opposite side of the leafy tamarisk, the place appointed for the morning conference with the elders. The season was too far advanced for the spikes of beautiful pink blossoms, which in spring enwrapped the tree in one gauzy sheet of color, but it was still very graceful, with its long feathery tufts and branches closely clad with the minutest of leaves. Somehow, to Jephthah, the whisper of the breeze playing among the leaf-laden boughs seemed like a message from Elishaba, and it soothed his perturbed spirit and prepared him for the approaching inter-

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view as nothing save the actual sound of her voice could.

The brothers were so utterly unlike in look, manner, and garb, at a casual glance it seemed hardly possible to believe that they were sons of the same father. Micah's appearance plainly bespoke a man accustomed to the peace and prosperity that belonged to the life of an hereditary shepherd. Indeed, it would be difficult to imagine a career more tranquil and uneventful than his. The expression of his face was pleasant to behold, and it bore testimony to the modest rectitude of his character; it proved also, that a man may honor God as much by a quiet performance of duty as by prominent action, for almost his entire life had been spent within a circuit of comparatively a few miles. And yet, few among the descendants of Gilead exerted a wider influence than this guileless man, who was loved and respected by all who knew him.

As daylight increased Jephthah's keen eye took note of his brother's garments, which were of fine spotless linen; he observed also the richly wrought girdle and costly abá, a striking contrast to his own rough mantle and coarse raiment, and a

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quick flash of jealous anger caused him to forget for a moment that it was by his own choice he thus appeared in the humble garb of an outcast, rather than the imposing costume of a mountain chief.

In spite of this simplicity of dress Jephthah's appearance was hailed with glances of admiration. And he had never looked more noble, and more fit to signalize himself by martial service. It was as though the spirit of the Lord, coming on him the day before, had given him new force of mind and heart for great undertakings, with a bodily strength sufficient to accomplish them. Still, there was a gloom on his brow, which added to his usual sternness of look as he listened to the elders' greeting words, and he was slow in answering. Twice they had to urge him, saying: "Come and be our captain, that we may fight with the children of Ammon." When at last he spoke, it was not to give immediate consent, for he saw that several of his own brethren were among those in authority, and "while he was willing to serve his country, he thought fit to give his former persecutors a hint of their past unkindness, that they might repent of their

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sin in using him so ill, and might for the future be more sensible of their obligations." Hence he asked: "Did ye not hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? And why are ye come unto me now, when ye are in distress?"

In reply the elders renewed their urgency, saying: "Therefore, because we formerly did thee this wrong, and to show thee that we repent of it, we turn again to thee now, to put such honor upon thee as shall balance that indignity."

Although Jephthah's acceptance was already determined, since he was dealing with men he had reason to distrust, he resolved before declaring it to make, as it were, a bargain for the future. But he did this without further reference to the evil they had done him. His soul was too generous to dwell on that. Neither did he speak with over much confidence of his own success, and he put an *if* before his acceptance, saying: "If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the Lord deliver them before me, shall I be your leader?"

To this question the elders immediately gave a positive answer: "The Lord be wit-

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ness between us," they said, "we will do according to thy words; command us in war and thou shalt command us in peace."

After this assurance Jephthah no longer withheld his consent, and an appointment was straightway made for the following day, when the contract was to be formally ratified before the tribe of Manassah, who had sent this deputation of elders to urge Jephthah to become their captain and leader in the proposed rising against the Amorites.

The army were encamped at Mizpeh, as Jephthah knew, and the watch-tower on it's summit was the place where he was to be duly installed into office. Meanwhile there was much to be accomplished. Micah undertook to provide Jephthah's outfit, and although he was so essentially a man of peace, his preparations were most warlike. Ozem, too, held himself in readiness to obey the chieftain's commands, and by noontime he was speeding across the country to summon Simon and the soldiers among Jephthah's band to repair without delay to Mizpeh, armed, and ready for battle. This order was, however, the lesser part of the trust the newly appointed cap-



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tain confided to the youth, by whom he sent a message to his daughter; Ozem felt this no light honor, and yet it was simply to bid her to await her father's return patiently, to pay heed to the harvesting of the ripening grain, and to impress upon the men who were not bidden to the war that Ozem was to rule over them during their chieftain's absence.

## CHAPTER VIII.

### HAPPY YESTERDAYS AND GLAD TO-MORROWS.

**I**T was nearing eventide of the day following Jephthah's charge to Ozem when Elisheba, accompanied by Simon, wended her way through the narrow glen that led to the spot where she expected to meet her father.

The golden rays of the setting sun gleamed over the still landscape with a soft and melancholy light. Elisheba's heart responded to the subtle influence, and for the first time in her young life—which had been peaceful as a Sabbath, and glad as the time of the new moon feasts—she felt oppressed by a sense of undefined forboding.

Doubtless the emotion was partly due to an unconscious loneliness; for she missed her father, from whom she had seldom been separated longer than the time spanned by a day and a night.

The half sadness of her mood added to her loveliness, and she was beautiful as a

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dream that hour. She wore, as on the day of her father's departure, the robe of dark blue, but her slight figure was now half concealed by a mantle of various hues, thrown gracefully across her shoulders, and which partly enveloped her head like a hood, from under which, and pushed back from her brow, her hair hung loosely, flowing in luxuriant abandonment in a sable mass like a veil about her face, which was perfect in its oval outline. Her forehead was broad and open, her eyebrows delicately penciled, while her eyes, large and deeply set, were naturally grave in their expression. Elishaba's complexion, like her father's, was dark, but with a warm glow of lovely color; her hands were small and shapely, the little nails pink as sea-shells; her feet were bare for coolness, save for the slight sandals she wore, to protect them from the roughness of the path. She was rather above the ordinary height, slender and graceful, and her long neck, and something in the way she carried her head, gave her a regal look that was as remarkable as her beauty.

When she and Simon reached the outlet of the glen, she bade him leave her, while he went in search of a wandering lamb.

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Simon did not hesitate to obey. It was a safe place; the hour was too early for the wild beasts of the wilderness and rocky defiles to come out of their haunts looking for prey. The only sound of animal life was the echo of kids bleating kindly, far off, up on the mountain-side.

Elisheba chose for her seat the trunk of a fallen olive-tree, which was surrounded by a plot of verdure be-starred with golden lilies and tufts of purple iris. A stream ran near by flowing over its pebbly bed on its way to the Jordan, and singing as it went. The air was scented with balm, sweet fern, fox-grape, and the rose of Jericho, a small woody annual with a short stem, and bearing many branches covered with white flowers. After seeding, these flowers dry and curl up into a ball like fairy wicker-work, which put into water expands and reopens. Hence we people of to-day call it the Resurrection, or Mary's flower.

As Elisheba sat on the fallen tree, encircled by beauty, her hands lay loosely open on her knee; her attitude bespoke serene repose, but although evidently she was musing, there was no suggestion of listlessness or indifference.

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Suddenly she half raised herself, and the thoughtful expression of her eyes changed into a questioning look. Her well-trained ear caught the sound of an approaching step that belonged neither to her father nor Simon.

She lifted her hand and shaded her eyes from the level rays of the fast westering sun as she scanned the stranger, who appeared a moment later.

And with that first sight of Ozem—for it was the Hebrew youth—the world and life changed for Elisheba.

For a second her half-parted lips closed, her open brow knit, as if she were striving to shape into thought a new and strange emotion, difficult to understand.

As Ozem advanced and bowed low before her, she rose from her seat, pushed back the dark tresses of her hair, and looked at him with a shy, sweet surprise, happy and bright, while in a voice, music-full as a song, she bade him welcome.

Meanwhile, Ozem never ceased to study her face. He straightway perceived that her dark hair and eyes were like her father's; he straightway felt that there was never a woman fashioned fairer. Elisheba neither

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reddened nor paled as she met Ozem's gaze; she looked at him with a calm, steady glance for full a minute, and then he saw a change: there was a bright dew in the softly-shaded eyes, a sweet quivering smile on the mouth, a purer and deeper pink in the rounded cheek. And she was so young, so beautiful, so bright; he was so brave, so true, so noble, no wonder the light in her eyes was tremulous with an undefined joy; no wonder she and Ozem smiled at one another as only the young, the pure, and the good can smile.

After that, the light that shone in the heaven above for the Hebrew youth and maiden was not only the glory of the westering sun, neither was it only the light of the rising moon.

Whence came that wonderful radiance? Was it reflected from memories of happy yesterdays, or was it the gladness and promise of happier to-morrows?

## CHAPTER IX.

### A BRIEF IDYL.

OZEM was the youngest son in a family that numbered many daughters. He was used to the rare beauty and grace which distinguished the dark-eyed Hebrew maidens. He was accustomed to the society of women; nevertheless, he was entirely unprepared for the vision of loveliness which greeted him in the person of Jephthah's daughter, and the joy he felt on beholding her was a new sensation, which did not abate during the time that elapsed before Simon returned from his quest after the wandering lamb.

It took but a moment for Ozem to explain to Simon his appearance in place of Jephthah, and Simon accepted the explanation with a good-humored nod, as he led the way toward home, bidding Ozem and Elishaba follow.

The stalwart soldier's giant-like strides soon outstripped his young companions, and as he went on in advance of them

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Ozem had a good opportunity for observing his gigantic size. Truly, Simon seemed a descendant of the old race of the Anakins, which Israel had overcome at the time of Joshua's conquest.

An hour later Simon's great bulk was rendered still more imposing, for when he and the other soldiers among Jephthah's followers started for Mizpeh, he was attired in "shining armor," and his helmet, jerkins, and greaves of bright copper mail were matched by the huge weapons he carried; they consisted of a copper-headed lance at his back, a mighty spear, iron-headed, in his hand, and a sword worthy of him girt at his side. This sword Simon lifted with no more effort than he would have used had it been merely a shepherd's staff.

Looking at Simon and his companions, Ozem understood without words why Jephthah and his warriors were famed for prowess, even to the out-most boundaries of Judea; he understood, too, why they were called "men whose faces were like the faces of lions, and who were as swift as the roes upon the mountains."

By nature Simon was both literal and unimaginative to an unusual degree; and



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yet, as he bade Elisheba farewell, he was confronted by a superstitious terror that caused him to bow his head, as though in response to a call of direful import. This impression of impending danger was augmented by the doleful hoot of a startled owl, which rent the air like a note of evil omen. And yet, what was there to fear?

Ozem had been the bringer of good tidings. Jephthah, Simon's well-beloved chief, had been appointed to a place of honor among the men of his tribe, and he—Simon himself—was starting forth to join in a war that he never doubted would end in victory. Still he trembled; he would fain have cast aside his coat of mail and weapons of warfare; he would fain have stayed at home with Elisheba and the women, the children, the feeble old men, and the untrained youths. Great beads of perspiration now gathered on his dark brow; the spear he had held so firmly would have fallen from his now unsteady hand had not Ozem grasped and firmly planted it in the yielding ground.

But before he had time to ask the cause of Simon's agitation Bichri, a Benjamite, blew the trumpet signal for departure, and

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Simon hurried to the front. And ere the shadow of the olive wood had reached the hillside, the company of brave men had crossed the torrent-bed in the middle of the ravine and passed far beyond the sound of either Ozem's or Elisheba's voice.

Immediately after the soldiers' departure Ozem—according to Jephthah's command—assumed control, and for a time he filled the place of ruler in the hamlet. He was a youthful champion for such a trust, but hourly he gained favor among the people, while, to Elisheba, intercourse with him was like an open door leading into a new and beautiful world; it was like treading a path where at every step she trod on a flower; it was as though he gave new sight to her eyes and new hearing to her ears. Yes, it was with her heart Elisheba heard those days.

Hour after hour she and Ozem spent in conversations that ranged from light to shadow, from playful to earnest. The earnest, however, dominated; for, as they sat in the doorway in the cool of the day, they talked of the subjects most dear to the children of Israel, and heaven touched earth on the horizon of their vision. God was in

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their thought, life was solemn with deep meaning. They had come to the crisis that occurs when earnest souls pause on the threshold of existence striving to find the place they occupy in the world, the object of life, and their relations to humanity. It is wont to be a difficult place, and those who pass through it safely, pressed forward by the impetus of life's power, are among the blessed.

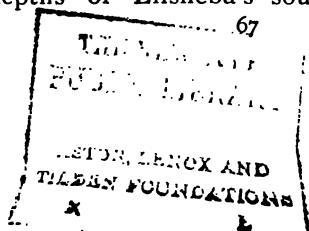
When at last their conversation turned to subjects of a more strictly personal character, they did not know how it came about, they glided into it as imperceptibly as the fading of the evening twilight, or the falling of shadows in the olive wood. Meanwhile the mystery of the future was sweet; they interpreted it by the life they knew, and their words were as a pleasant song set to the tune of hope. If perchance now and then Ozem spoke by the head, as is the way with men, Elisheba's utterances were by the heart, and head and heart thus combined, disposed their minds to the consideration of the noble and the true, while it inclined their souls to high purposes and unselfish aspirations. And so it happened that the gates of the beautiful and the good opened

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wide for them, and they looked within, they looked up, and on.

Elisheba's life until now had been peculiarly solitary. Her father, Simon, and Naomi had been her only intimate companions. For the youths and maidens—of whom there were no lack among the families that composed Jephthah's band—regarded her as their superior; and while they accorded her the place of leader in dance and song, they were reserved in manner and speech. With Ozem all this was different; he was her equal in social and mental ability, and he had far outreached her in the power of reasoning. For although he was so young, he already had spent some months at the school of the Prophets recently founded at Jericho. Naomi rejoiced in her darling Elisheba's happiness without questioning the result of the growing friendship, neither did she observe the deep hush of emotion that came now and then—like a pause in the song of a bird—over Elisheba's youthful gayety. This was as well, for even had Naomi noticed, she was a prosaic woman, and quite unable to comprehend the awakening thoughts and aspirations stirring the until then quiet depths of Elisheba's soul. But, though



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slow of perception, no joy was dearer to Naomi than the pleasure of sitting at Elishaba's feet busy with her spinning or some homely task, and listening meanwhile to the maiden's silvery laugh and soft tender voice.

Naomi had always been thus devoted to Jephthah's daughter; she had ever been ready to do her bidding in small matters as well as great. Many a time when tired from the toil of the day, weariness became almost pleasant, because the work had been done for love of Elisheba. This devotion made to Naomi—as well as to Ozem and Elisheba—the hours of that glad time so full of happiness, that they seemed each to count as a day. Thus it happened Ozem and Elisheba had known one another little more than a rounded week, when it was as though they had always been dear and trusted friends and companions. Those days were crowned, too, by Elisheba's recognition of the exceeding beauty and meaning of harmony linked with sound. For while from childhood she had loved music as birds love song, and while she had been early taught the use of timbrel and harp, it was left for Ozem to open her heart to the music of life and love.

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Nor was this all, for as his poetic imagination clothed every object and event, even the most insignificant daily duty, in language etherealized by the accompanying strain of harp or pipe, the thought of the least work worthily done, or of the least service rendered others, became sacred to Elisheba, and beautiful, like some winged thing, ready to soar heavenward upborne by sweet sound.

## CHAPTER X.

### OZEM'S CREED.

**I**T was not only love and duty Ozem's words illumined for Elisheba, he explained the books of the law, in a way which diffused a before unknown light and hope into the words, that according to her father's interpretation had been encompassed with gloom and fear.

It would have been difficult to find one better fitted for this task than Ozem. His mind was deeply imbued with the history of his people; he had from infancy been surrounded by religious influences, and, while he had received no open vision from the Lord, he recognized an inner communion, which elevated the moral above the external, and he felt that formal observance should be wholly subordinate in religion to the spiritual, and that the highest fulfillment of the law as given by Moses was rendered by the heart and life, that to obey is better than sacrifice.

Thus, while Ozem did not overlook the

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necessity of the observance of the ceremonial law, he realized that it was outward at best, and that hearty loyalty to the "Ten Words" spoken by God from Sinai was far more vital. He was so impressed with this, that he felt with all the strength of opening manhood the work of his life was to help bring back his people to their early faith, and to lead them to put away the gods of the heathen and to serve Jehovah.

It was a gigantic task, but amidst much to discourage there were gleams of light. Ozem had the idea in his mind of progress, of a movement in the order of things toward some great end and consummation. This fastening of the mind upon the future is a striking and remarkable feature of the age to which the dawn of prophecy belongs. In Ozem it took the form of looking forward to a happy time when the law of love, and the love of law, would reign hand in hand, and do away with evil, and all would be peace and innocence.

But though sometimes this hope was bright and clear, it did not always hold sway in Ozem's mind. It came and went, a sweet but broken strain, whose notes floated upon the air often to be scattered



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flocks found refreshment on the slopes of verdure that marked either a gently flowing water course, or some deep still pool. At such times Elisheba was wont to hold in one hand a tablet covered with wax, and in the other a styloid—or sharp-pointed iron pen—while with patient labor she strove to trace the words Ozem slowly dictated, as he read from his much-treasured copy of the book of the law.

Elisheba was an apt scholar when Ozem was the teacher; the lessons of six days contained as much as a full month of ordinary instruction. Her efforts were concentrated in writing without mistake Joshua's command to his people: "Put away the gods which your fathers served on the other side of the flood, and I took your father Abraham from the other side of the flood." It seemed a strange verse to Elisheba, but when she asked Ozem its meaning he was ready with a reply. And although his words were simple, they were vivid as pictures, as he explained how "sacred history declares Abraham to have been under Divine inspiration, the leader of the whole movement which set up the worship of the true God in the place of idols, and how he had sepa-

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rated his family from the corrupt religions of the world."

As Elisheba listened she did not know that Ozem was dealing with a question that touched the deepest life of God's chosen people, but she distinctly understood the chief object of her own and Ozem's life was that, like Abraham, they should "keep the way of the Lord, to do justice and judgment, and obey His voice and keep His charge, His commandments, His statutes, and His laws."

Such conversations almost always ended by Ozem's chanting a song of praise to the Almighty, and of them all Elisheba entered most warmly into the spirit of the anthem which proclaimed :

" My heart rejoices in Jehovah !  
No one is holy as Jehovah,  
For there is no God like Thee !  
No god is a Rock like our God."

Ozem was wont to linger over that last line, and once he repeated it before he added the refrain :

" He will keep the feet of His saints."

Elisheba, as she harkened, stood as one

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transfigured. Ozem never forgot the look in her wonderful eyes at that moment. It stayed by him as the memory of the light of a new-born day shining on a world of darkness.

## CHAPTER XI.

### PATRIARCHAL GOVERNMENT.

**I**N the early days of the Hebrew settlement in Palestine the people were so accustomed to the simple patriarchal government, aversion to the authority of any one individual was universal and profound. Hence among the Gileadites public opinion questioned the wisdom of the elders when Jephthah's recall, and their intention of conferring upon him supreme control, became generally known. This was but natural, for while Moses had given Israel a code of civil and religious laws, he had left them without anything equivalent to a political constitution. His great aim had been to establish the worship of Jehovah as their invisible King and God so firmly, as to preclude the possibility of their falling permanently from it, but he had omitted any reference to a special political order. Thus on the separation of the tribes to their respective territories they at once reverted to the sim-

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plicity of their ancestors, and as in the days of Abraham, the father of the family was the ruler, and his authority passed on to the eldest son through successive generations. If the country was invaded each man armed himself as he could, and followed the chief of his village, who led to the general rallying place, which in Jephthah's time, among the Gileadites, was the Watch-tower on Mt. Mizpeh.

These details represent the condition of the people over whom Jephthah was called to rule. A spirit less brave than his would have trembled at such an outlook, but he was in no way daunted by the difficulties that confronted him. This was proved by his determination to include in his acceptance of the high position the pledge, that if victorious, his rule over the land and people of Gilead was to be continuous and absolute.

While ambition and a desire for self-aggrandizement led him to seek this supreme control, he was influenced, also, by a sense of the importance of central authority. The circumstances of his life had led him to feel the need of this; he had had unusual opportunities for observing the unsettled state of

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God's chosen people, and he knew that it was a period marked by an increasing discontent and decadence, not only of the national spirit, but of the national religion. In fact, in many instances the tribes were being lost in the heathen communities around, as from intermarriage with them to taking part in their idolatrous worship was but a step. The religion of the Canaanites was, too, a terrible snare to a people whose fathers had lived amidst the pompous idolatry of the Nile. But there is no need for a detailed account of the local idolatry with which as a Ruler of Gilead Jephthah would need to contend. We have rather to consider the effect of the sudden change in his position and circumstances on his future and on Elisheba's.

On Jephthah's character, alas! promotion had an unfortunate influence; it acted as the weight in the scale which, failing to uplift and stimulate high aims and an unselfish purpose in life, sank him down below even the moral and spiritual level which had ruled his motives during the years of exile. Thus it happened that the spirit of the Lord, which came to him in the hour of mountain-top communion, departed, for

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want of encouragement to stay, and the result was a steady deterioration in motive and principle. But neither Jephthah, nor those who knew him best, caught a hint of this for many days.

## CHAPTER XII.

### JEPHTHAH'S VIGIL.

JEPHTHAH, for an ordinarily self-contained man, was unduly excited after his interview with the elders. A fierce fire seemed kindled in his heart; he found it difficult to maintain an appearance of outward composure; he was impatient to have the hour come when he would be invested with the full power and importance of his new rank as captain and leader of his tribe.

As darkness settled down over the earth he became so restless he felt the need of being alone under the open sky, and soon after midnight he passed quietly out of Micah's dwelling. During the hours that followed he lived over in memory many events connected with the past. His thoughts centered with peculiar vividness on the day of his banishment, and while there was scant sentiment in Jephthah's nature—save for his daughter—he smiled as he remembered that long-ago time when he had been bid-



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den to appear at the Watch-tower to hear his doom, just as he was bidden to appear on the morrow—but for such a different purpose! And then he thought how Micah had said Nahum, the very same priest who had uttered the sentence of his banishment, was the one appointed to offer the public sacrifice, and to record his vow of fidelity, as Ruler in Israel.

Jephthah remembered the words with which Micah—his ever faithful brother—had implored Nahum to revoke the harsh sentence. He recalled the look of pity in Nahum's face as he refused, but he had no idea that the sympathy which shone in the priest's eyes, and sounded in his voice, was due to his possession of a spiritual onlook that, like Abraham's vision, reached beyond the dark, mistaken belief of the age, and caught a glimpse of the distant time when a star would come out of Jacob and a sceptre rise out of Israel."

As he meditated Jephthah's mood had softened, and again, for a brief time, the noblest elements of his character were stirred, and he besought the Lord to strengthen him in the inner as well as the outer man. And although he shared the prevailing idea

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that sacrifice was well pleasing unto the Lord as he knelt in humble prayer, in the holy hush of night, he was dimly conscious of something higher than the doctrine of paganism, and the sanguinary worship, which materialized supplication by a sequel which included propitiatory offering of fruit, bird, beast, and alas! sometimes human life. This dim consciousness was nothing less than a ray of light from the dawn of christianity, which began to reveal God as a Spirit, to be worshipped in spirit and in truth long before Jephthah's day. It kindled when in Eden the Lord declared unto the father of evil: "I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed. It shall bruise thy head and thou shalt bruise his heel."

The hold this promise of a future Deliverer had taken on the minds of the people of Israel shone like a golden ray of hope in the heart of every loyal son of Abraham, and while the wondrous grace thus foreshadowed was perceived only very imperfectly, there was hardly a Hebrew father who did not cherish the fond expectation that his own daughter might be honored of the Lord, and the mother of the promised

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Messiah. In Jephthah's heart, although he had never confided it even to Simon, this hope for Elisheba had been the dream of his life. The thought of it was not absent as he sought strength to put to flight the army of the aliens. He became so absorbed and so fired with desire for the fulfillment of his hope, he failed to note the flight of time. When at length he arose from his knees he perceived that the moon, encircled by a broad yellow aureole, had traveled far across the sky, and was fast nearing the horizon; while the innumerable stars that had shone with radiant glory in the pure, dark vault of the heavens were now beginning to fade before the approaching dawn.

As Jephthah noticed these signs in the sky he realized it was time he re-entered Micah's dwelling. The good man was still wrapped in the calm repose that is wont to refresh a heart like his at peace with God and man.

Jephthah stepped lightly across the room so as not to disturb the sleeper, and throwing himself on a couch, closed his eyes to secure if possible a half hour's rest. But he was in no mood for slumber, and when at last it laid its light touch on tired limbs

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and excited brain it was only a short troubled sleep, during which a horror of great darkness fell on him, and he awoke with a start. Micah was already stirring and making ready for the duties of the day. The brothers greeted one another gravely, and few words were spoken during the morning meal, or later, when Jephthah appeared in the full glory of martial equipment. Before they went out, however, by mutual impulse they paused, and standing side by side, with uncovered heads, in solemn tones they repeated the Hebrew creed: "Hear, O Israel, the Lord our God is one Lord. And thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."

There was a profound significance in this declaration of faith, just as Jephthah was going forth to enroll himself as leader in battle, for "these words in Deuteronomy, sixth chapter and fourth verse, were known from the Hebrew verb, with which they open, as the *shemà*, and they were regarded as the Israelite's passport to Paradise."

## CHAPTER XIII.

### THE WATCH-TOWER.

EARLY rising was a habit in Gilead, and it was still the "spring of day" when Micah and Jephthah turned their faces toward Mizpeh; and many beside themselves were astir. Leaving the village, they wended their way in and out among the tents and camp-fires that smouldered at regular intervals up the mountain-side. As they neared the summit, every object deepened Jephthah's emotion and enhanced the beauty of the extensive view which he now beheld with the eyes of a man about to exchange his life of banishment for the grave duties and responsibilities of Ruler over the people of this fair land. Behind him, on the west, towered the gray honey-combed granite cliffs which centuries later became known as the "Mount of Temptation." In the immediate fore-ground the green oasis spread to the village of Jericho, and onward past Gilgal toward the Jordan beyond. On the other side

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of the river the dark mountains of Moab and Edom bounded the eastern horizon, having the wide plain of Abel-Shittim at their feet and the heights of Nebo and Pisgah above. Far away to the south the Dead Sea slept in its mysterious sepulchre. Northward stretched the valley of the Jordan, sheltered by the everlasting hills on each side, and the noble mountains of Gilead and Basham on the east.

This vast area of plain and mountain, river and sea was so familiar to Jephthah his spiritual eye filled in the features of the landscape which the visual organ failed to perceive. It was, indeed, an amazing panorama, and one well fitted to stir his soul with ambition and desire for the hour of action and conquest. Nevertheless these feelings, compared with his enthusiasm when he caught sight of the Watch-tower, were like the breath of a summer breeze contrasted with a blast of winter's north wind. As he and Micah stood before the local sanctuary the east was aglow with the crimson light of sunrise, and the morning air echoed with the sounds of trumpet and horn, as company after company of eager Gileadites scrambled among the brakes and

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over loose stones, in their haste to gain a vantage ground from which to behold the newly chosen captain.

Seldom had they looked upon a man whose every motion and expression so evidenced a mighty warrior. In truth, a mere glance at Jephthah was enough to rouse admiration in the minds of his friends and to strike terror into the hearts of his foes. His attire was, indeed, warlike; he wore a round helmet of copper, beneath which his long black hair flowed over a coat of scaled mail of the same metal. His legs were protected by brazen greaves—similar to Simon's. At his back hung a shining spear, and a sword depended from his side, and in his hand he bore an iron-tipped lance. But the sword and the spear were the weapons on which he chiefly depended. The sword, short and two-bladed, hung from his belt or girdle, and even when held in the left hand of a practiced swordsman as he was, it was capable of inflicting a frightful wound. Micah's eldest son, a youth of twenty years, had been appointed to act as armor-bearer; he met his uncle at the entrance of the court surrounding the sanctuary, which they entered together, and he carried a

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huge shield sufficiently large to cover, if needs be, the chieftain's body.

All this display was unusual among the Gileadites. The leading men of the tribe sometimes carried lances of iron, but bows and arrows and slings were the arms in common use among the Hebrews. Defensive armor—except the shield and smaller buckler borne on the left arm—were almost unknown, and but few among that concourse of people had ever until then seen greaves for the legs or a helmet.

But it was not so much the splendor of his equipment as Jephthah's personality that called forth the prolonged shouts of applause that greeted him. He was so evidently in the full power of manhood; his bearing was so majestic and dignified; his sunburnt visage and vigorous muscular development so told of the strength acquired in the free life of the hills, and the expression of his countenance, although imperious and haughty, was so straightforward and open, it was no wonder he won general favor. His dark eyes shone with a look of fervor as he crossed the threshold of the Watchtower. It was a place that naturally kindled enthusiasm in a soul like his; it was



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associated with the early history of his people. This was the very hill-top where years before Jacob had erected the boundary mark between himself and Laban. Later it had become a favorite place of national assembly, and still later the Watch-tower had been built and dedicated.

Nahum the priest, the elders, and chief men of Gilead were already assembled in the central hall of the sanctuary when Jephthah appeared. As he stepped within, the shouts of the people ceased, and so great and profound was the hush that pervaded the sacred edifice, the flitting of the bats aloft among the rafters and upper windows could be distinctly heard. Jephthah walked slowly up the long hall, and his mien was grave and stern as he presented himself before Nahum, who sat on a dais raised at the far end of the sanctuary. The elders were grouped about, arrayed in their ceremonial robes, with the broad blue fringe that proclaimed their faith, and which swept the ground as they moved. Over their arms were twined the sacred scrolls of the law, and when they stood and prayed they drew the mystic veil—as Moses did of old—over brow and face. Although they were an im-

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posing company, Jephthah's gaze passed beyond them and rested on Nahum, who seemed to him "as one who stood half-way 'twixt heaven and earth." Nahum meanwhile was entirely unconscious of the impression his presence made on the chieftain, to whom the very colors of the priestly robe were fraught with significance. It was "a brodered coat of gold, and blue, and scarlet, and purple, and fine linen."

Jephthah was well-nigh bewildered by the events of the last few days, and a crowd of before unknown emotions agitated his mind. He felt a strange quickening of his pulse as he beheld the gleam of the twelve gems Nahum wore on his breastplate, in token that "he for his people might plead, and that not one of the twelve tribes of Israel were forgotten in his supplications." The sparkle of the Urim's mysterious glow, its wild oracular rays, were also pregnant with meaning. And Jephthah inclined to superstition; he fully believed the tradition that the light, red, clear, or dim, which shot forth from the central gem—a priceless diamond—indicated either bloodshed, prosperity, or disaster. And as he raised himself after bowing down before Nahum it seemed

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to glow with a terrible light, that even at that proud moment in his history filled his valiant spirit with dismay. Despite the hundred eyes watching his every look and action, he stood as though spell-bound while with a fixed, immovable gaze he looked at the strange and, to his excited imagination, disastrous spark. Minutes counted full five, and yet he stood thus stiff and dumb, as though the hand of Jehovah had suddenly fallen heavily upon him. When at last he essayed to speak his voice was hollow, his lips parched. And then, as suddenly as the emotion had come it disappeared and his wonted dignity returned, as with the manner of a mighty Ruler, rather than a man just recalled from exile, he addressed Nahum, saying:

“The Lord God hath commanded you to summon me His servant back to His people, and in obedience to your command I have come. Acquaint me therefore with your wishes, and if by the blessing of God I return from battle a conqueror, tell me plainly, shall I be your head?”

This was the very question he had asked the elders the day before. Nahum's reply was as quick and decided as theirs, and he

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enforced the pledge they had given by repeating the words, "The Lord be witness between us if we do not according to thy words."

But even this solemn assurance failed to satisfy Jephthah, and drawing his tall figure up to a still greater height, he scanned the faces of the people with a look that strove to read their inmost thoughts. After a moment of this intense scrutiny he turned and walked quickly back to the entrance of the court, when he stooped and lifted two large stones with his powerful arms. Propping them together, he exclaimed in a loud voice: "Let this heap be a witness between me and thee, that if the land be freed I shall be its Ruler all the days of my life."

Nahum the priest, the elders, and chief men of Gilead accepted the condition, and led by Nahum they followed, one the other, in solemn order, and each laid a hand upon the stones as they repeated their vow of allegiance to their newly chosen Captain and Ruler. When every man had pledged himself, Jephthah came forward and placed his own strong right hand on the improvised altar in token of loyalty to the high office, into which he was soon duly inducted.

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The inaugural services were simple but impressive. Nahum anointed Jephthah's head with sacred oil and pronounced a brief invocation, and then Jephthah spread the matter before the Lord, both his choice to the office and his anticipated execution of its duties. And his words were well pleasing unto all who heard, and so was Nahum's address. He defined the power conferred on Jephthah, and he bade him remember he, although a Ruler, was under a Higher Ruler, whose will as expressed in His revealed Law was to be an absolute guide alike in religious and secular life, its transgression in any particular being self-destruction. Nahum explained also, that a man truly religious would obey the law of God not by mere outward assent, but by a living inward choice. Meanwhile a scribe wrote down Jephthah's prayer and Nahum's address in a book duly laid up before Jehovah. Thus far the services had taken place within the sanctuary, but the sacrifices which followed were offered at the public "high-place," and in the presence of the multitude.

According to custom a feast preceded the sacrifices, over which Jephthah presided.

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He sat in a circle of invited guests who treated him with profound respect, and placed before him the choicest parts of the lamb that he might be the first to partake of a portion. When the feast and sacrifices were completed he was escorted with great pomp and honor to the house accorded him on his accession to office, and with this honor the ceremony ended.

The house allotted Jephthah was in the hill-town known as Micah's village, and not more than a mile south of the Watch-tower. On reaching his new home Jephthah straightway resorted to the flat roof, which was protected from the midday heat and the dew of midnight by a simple awning, and thus rendered the pleasantest part of the dwelling in the hot summer. But even this retired place did not secure the quiet the chieftain sought. Already several swift runners were awaiting his orders. And as became a man accustomed to rule and prompt action, before the sun went down he had dispatched half a dozen messengers on different errands and toward different destinations.

## CHAPTER XIV.

### PREPARATION FOR WAR.

JEPHTHAH quickly gauged the spirit of the men over whom he had been appointed captain; he immediately perceived that bold advance and vigorous action would inspire the motley crowd with courage, while a timid or delayed movement would as surely prove depressing. Still, he determined to observe the courtesy due even to an enemy, and he accorded the foe an opportunity to settle the difficulty without bloodshed.

Hence a messenger was dispatched to the king of the children of Ammon, demanding his reasons for invading the land of Gilead. "What hast thou to do with me that thou hast come against me to fight my land?" this was the question Jephthah asked. And the king of the children of Ammon answered: "Because Israel took away my land when they came out of Egypt."

In response Jephthah sent a second messenger to the hostile king, but again he refused

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to listen to apology and appeal, and to decide the controversy "Jephthah put himself upon God and his sword," and plans for a speedy battle were pushed forward. Meanwhile Simon and his company of soldiers arrived, and were at once instated as Jephthah's special body-guard. Simon's presence stirred a great longing in Jephthah's heart for his daughter, and he was glad when the trusty soldier declared that Elisheba's safety was imperiled by the unsettled state of the surrounding country, and that it could only be secured by her removal from the cliff-girt eyrie to Micah's carefully guarded village.

The arrangements for Elisheba's removal were soon made, and after a brief consultation with Micah, Jephthah dispatched a trained runner, with a parchment roll, on which was written an order bidding Ozem escort, without delay, Naomi, the maiden Elisheba, the women, children, and tender flocks to Jephthah's new home on the southern slope of Mount Mizpeh. Jephthah knew Micah would watch over Elisheba with a care tender as his own, and a heavy burden was lifted from his heart when he felt that if all went well, before the second quarter of



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the moon Naomi and his darling daughter would be within the safe protection of Micah's peaceful vale. So promptly were the chieftain's plans made and executed, before midnight of the day following Simon's arrival, the public thoroughfare leading from Mizpeh to the camp of the Amorites echoed to the tramp of marching soldiers and the blast of trumpets. At the same time in the secluded path through the olive wood which led to Jephthah's eyrie, the sound of the pad-pad of a swift runner over the summer-dried ground startled the birds in their nests, and scared the wild beasts back to their coverts among the rocks and tangled underwood.

## CHAPTER XV.

### A SHORT JOURNEY.

EARLY in the morning of the day on which Jephthah's messenger reached the hamlet, Ozem, Elisheba, and Naomi had driven the flock to a wady where the short-leaved herbage was peculiarly fresh and wholesome for the young lambs and tender kids. This patch of verdure formed the one small oasis in an otherwise desolate region, while a thicket of canes, covered with a close growth of fox-grape and other vines, afforded safe nesting-places for thrushes, grakles, and warblers. It was wonderful how green things had found root in the scanty soil of this nook, which was shut in by bowlders and lesser rocks from all eyes save those keen as Elisheba and Ozem's in their search for pasturage. It required, also, ears well trained as theirs to catch the murmur of the running water which, like a sweet benediction on this wild place, flowed in a liquid stream, gently

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winding in its course, which was indicated by a delicate fringe of vegetation.

In her childhood Elisheba had named this retreat, and the cliff above, "the rocks of the wild goats." Truly only they, and the gazelles, could find footing on the narrow ledge of cliffs which a little further on shut in a dreary ravine with perpendicular sides overhung by crags. A traveler passing between these gloomy walls of stone, on looking up, could only discern a narrow strip of blue sky against which on the right, the rugged outline was sharply defined in some places by bastions or spurs; while to the left were continuous heights for a mile or more, broken only by a bifurcated recess.

Although Elisheba and her companions partook of their noon-tide meal within a stone's throw of this sombre gorge, their spirits were gay and blithesome as the birds that fluttered about their feet.

Elisheba, in the lightness of her heart, laughed aloud at the strife between a grackle and a buff-bird, who with the boldness of innocence were both intent on picking a kernel of corn from the open pouch that hung by Ozem's side.

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In the birds' eagerness to find a morsel of food for their young, they thrust their sharp beaks in and out with shrill clatter and never a fear of detection.

Suddenly in the midst of her sunny happiness Elisheba lifted her head, and then as suddenly she bent her ear to the ground to quicken her sense of hearing.

All the time she continued to smile, for her thought anticipated the fact that the sound of running steps portended news from her father. A moment later a lad, wearing the garb of a trained runner, made his way through the thicket and prostrated himself breathlessly on the grass before Ozem. He had been guided to this hidden-away spot by the sound of Elisheba's joyous laughter. After resting for a second, he drew forth from the pocket fastened to his leather girdle a roll of parchment, which he handed to Ozem.

As Ozem read the words of Jephthah's order his courage well-nigh failed; it was no easy task to tell Elisheba, not merely that her father had gone forth to battle, but that she and Naomi were bidden to leave their home, and to dwell among strangers. Had any voice other than Ozem's an-

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nounced these tidings Elisheba would have grieved like a hurt child. She had so surely expected her father's return, and the exodus was to be so immediate, it was indeed disappointing and startling news. But, though Ozem was a youth in age, he was a masterful, tender man in heart, and the combination of sweetness and strength enabled him to understand the secret of comforting. Hence, as Elisheba listened to his interpretation of her father's commands, she smiled even as she wept. This sense of happiness mingled with regret continued during the hasty return home, and the busy hours of preparation which followed. There was much to be done; the excitement and bustle pervaded the entire hamlet; in every dwelling women and children were making ready for their departure, which Ozem decided must be soon as the dawn of the morrow.

Ozem understood Elisheba's mood; he knew her feeling of joy came from the hope of being nearer her father, and where she could surely be the first to greet him, according to his promise, when he returned in triumph from battle, for that he would be victorious she never doubted.

The desire to be the first to welcome a

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returning hero was universal among the Hebrews. Elisheba had often heard of it, and already she had made many plans for her father's home-coming, which she had determined to make an occasion of joyous festivity. As for the young girl's dread of going among strangers, Ozem understood that too. He knew she was by nature too pure, sweet, and courageous to harbor false fear, and that her regret came simply from a loyal clinging to the home where she had been happy, and to the life she knew.

Elisheba's energy did not flag as she helped Naomi make ready for the hasty start, but when at last everything was done a spirit of restlessness came over her. She felt she could not join in the singing and dancing, by which the older people of the tribe encouraged the younger ones to express their exultant pride in the promotion of their chief to the rank of Captain and Ruler. The mere sound of the general joyance jarred her, and to escape it she stole away unobserved, and wandered down the grassy slope of the glen until she came to her favorite haunt—the flat stone above the well. By this time the sense of gladness had quite died out of her heart, just as the

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rosy glow fades out of the sky an hour after sunset. Her sadness increased as the thought of the familiar things which on the morrow she must leave. Her dark eyes rested tenderly on every surrounding object, and she sighed, as she wondered, would she ever return to the dwelling-place on the plateau, that from childhood had been her home? Would she ever again behold the hoary dimness of the delicate foliage of her favorite olive-tree, as she saw it then, in the soft radiance of twilight? Would she ever "trace line by line the gnarled wreathings of the intricate branches, and the pointed fret-work of its light and narrow leaves inlaid on the blue field of the sky; would she ever behold the rosy-white of its spring blossoming, and the beads of sable fruit scattered by autumn along the topmost boughs—the fruit considered in Israel the right of the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow?" Would she ever again listen to the ripple of the water course over its pebbly bed, or come back to joy in the green pastures, the golden lilies, anemones, and purple roses her feet had pressed and her hands gathered that very morning, as she and Ozem had followed the flocks?

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Ozem's voice interrupted Elisheba's musing, and it dispelled her melancholy, and her sweet face was bright as a sunbeam when, in response to Naomi's call, she and Ozem turned homeward. Smiles still played about her rosy lips, and shone in the clear depths of her sparkling eyes as she bade Ozem good-night, using the form of speech common among the children of Israel. To Ozem the simple words seemed freighted with a new and dearer significance, as she uttered the benediction: "The Lord watch between me and thee while we be absent one from another." As the echo of Elisheba's voice died away quiet settled down over the hamlet, and one by one the lights disappeared in the humble homes that were to be abandoned on the morrow. The short summer night was not long in passing; the morrow came quickly. Elisheba awoke at the first beam of light, and she wondered, as many a maiden had before, and since, where the darkness and the light met! She wondered whence came the power of the one to put out the other! Was the world of nature a parable of human life?

Of the journey, which began at sunrise, there is little to tell, but for Elisheba there



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was much to remember. From the hour of starting until they arrived at Micah's village Ozem scarcely left her side. He guided the steps of her patient ass as they crossed rough valleys, or descended rocky hills, and climbed steep ascents. He cheered her flagging courage when the way was desolate and bare, and when they came to verdurous grassy wadies he gathered cluster after cluster of white and yellow lilies of the field, bunches of crimson anemones, and iris, purple and violet; Elisheba never wearied twining the flowers into wreaths. She crowned her raven locks with the yellow lilies; she garlanded the neck of her dumb ass with the crimson anemones; she tipped a slender sceptre of alder with the iris; she wove the pure white lilies into a breast-knot, which she fastened above her beating heart; she was happy as a queen, and though she did not know it, she reigned queen of Ozem's life and future.

When night came Ozem still kept guard over Elisheba; with his own hands he pitched the tent in which she and Naomi slept, and he kept the watch-fire burning brightly all through the hours of darkness. In fact, Ozem never sought repose, save for

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a brief time just before sunrise when the men of the party were astir and making ready for the coming day's on-march. Then for a half hour he lay down and slept before the curtained door of Naomi and Elisheba's tent, resting his head on his rough abá of sheepskin, and that softest of all pillows—a happy, hopeful heart.

They were three days in accomplishing the short journey, and each day repeated its forerunner's experience of joy, with only the difference that as the third drew toward evening they came in sight of Micah's village, and of the kindly man, who accompanied by his daughters came to the foot of the mount, to welcome Elisheba to her new home.

As Elisheba listened to her uncle's gentle words of greeting her heart felt to love him, with a love that deepened as days came and went.

## CHAPTER XVI

### A SERMONETTE.

**D**ESPITE the confusion of the times, and the war that rent the land of Gilead, an undercurrent of peaceful life still held sway in Micah's heart and home, and he entered with warm sympathy and interest into the simple pleasures that filled the summer days for Elisheba and Ozem. Many a time his soul was moved with wonder as he listened to their words, and often he said to Nahum—the priest—that Ozem's quickness of mind and keen spiritual insight proclaimed him a true descendant of Abraham, the father of the faithful, without any tracing of genealogy.

Micah was wont to be a silent listener when with Ozem and Elisheba, but his mind kept step with theirs, and thus it happened almost simultaneously they rejected certain conditions of the creed and form of worship in which they had all been trained from childhood. And, as if anticipating the trial

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which was so soon to test their faith, they threw off the chain of custom, and relieved from the thralldom of early association grasped, no longer dimly but with full beauty and power, the greatness of one God who could be worshipped without the aid of figure or symbol. It was the study of Abraham's colloquy with God over the impending fate of Sodom, which suggested to Ozem the question of Divine justice, which has always been connected with the doctrine of the unity of God. The working of Ozem's mind, as he strove to solve the question, is easy to follow. As soon as he accepted the truth of "one God," who is both good and omnipotent, he was met by the query, Why should He, who is omnipotent, permit that which He, who is in His own nature supremely good, cannot desire—that which is evil? True, this thought does not come out in any regular or full form in that mysterious colloquy, and yet it hovers over it; there are hints and forecastings of this grave question which is destined to trouble the human intellect, to try faith, and to absorb meditation as long as the world lasts.

Ozem did not escape its shadow, but in

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his soul it was met by the only answer: "Shall not the Judge of all the earth do right? And his assent was unhesitating and sure, and the confidence born of that trust in God became to the Hebrew youth from that time on "an anchor of the soul, sure and steadfast, and which entered within the veil."

While Micah and Elisheba shared this confidence, in actual thought, Ozem passed beyond them; at the same time Elisheba—as is often the case with women—was endowed with the "angel instinct" which bestows "a clairvoyance of the heart," and she was thus able to grasp Ozem's conclusions, as well as to share his faith.

It was Elisheba, too, who sought to discover the place sacrifice and burnt-offerings were meant to fill in the religious life of the nation. Was she influenced by some unconscious premonition of her future? Who can tell?

It was also a singular circumstance, that the place where this conversation occurred was on the same spur of the mount Jephthah had sought the night before he was instated captain and leader of his people.

Micah was with Ozem and Elisheba that

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day; indeed, it was Micah who led to the barren hill-top, where at noon-time they rested in the shadow of a great rock, while Ozem read aloud from the Book of the Law the account of Abraham's life, and the trial of his faith in the Divine promise that he should be the father of a great nation.

Naturally their talk centered on the sacrifice of Isaac, and Ozem dwelt upon the fact that it was in no way a copy of the human sacrifices of the Canaanites, even though the two were connected by the common principle of sacrifice or surrender. Nevertheless, even while Ozem declared, except for this one common element, the difference was such as to completely separate them from each other as religious acts—the one being only a trial of faith, the other but a propitiation of an angry divinity—he could not explain this with the clear light of a latter-day comprehension, “for the full beauty of the moral reserved itself until Judaism had passed away and given place to the Gospel.”

Still, he and his companions understood enough of the sacred significance of sacrifice to enable them to appreciate the truth, that it was only a holy thing when offered

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in trust and obedience to Jehovah; they perceived that the sacrifices well pleasing to God were a broken spirit, a contrite heart, submissive to His will, and that He delighted not in burnt-offerings, but in loving obedience, and the fulfillment of the command given by Moses: "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy might."

Elisheba caught so bright a gleam of the true meaning of sacrifice and service that hour, that it never afterward failed her; it magnified, too, the thought it suggested, of an invisible power—the Lord—who had the right to all she had, and to whom everything must be surrendered upon His demand.

With this recognition of an Almighty Being, a boundless and before unknown hope sprang up in her heart, and "hope is the first sight mortals catch of returning good, the faint gleam of it which heralds and represents the end. But hope which is sure is not hope. It is hope, while all is dark around us—while as yet there is no visible link between us and the end—that exhibits the principle in its true energy," and

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it was thus Elisheba, the Hebrew maiden, possessed it. This was how she hoped later on, when the sun was turned to darkness, the stars left their places, and earth and heaven vanished from her sight; when to the eye of sense all had gone that life held most dear, and the promise of joy had come to an end, for amid all this she kept her faith in Jehovah, His care over her remained as certain as ever, as absolutely sure and fixed.



## CHAPTER XVII.

### MICAH'S HARVEST FIELD.

**A**LTHOUGH war so sadly devastated the pleasant land of Gilead, Micah's vineyard and fields had escaped molestation, and the vintage had ripened peacefully in the sun; the fields were yellow with barley, and the waving wheat fast turned from green to golden. Micah was very busy those days; he had much to do and many harvesters working under him, and there came a morning when he asked Ozem and Elisheba to share his labor. On reaching the field he allotted to Ozem the place of leader of the row of sun-browned reapers. Elisheba, meanwhile, was to fill a foremost rank among the maidens who followed the reapers, binding the sheaves behind them. Elisheba laughed joyfully when Micah proposed this plan. She was eager to show Ozem how skillfully she could bind the sheaves, and how swiftly she could gather the ears of cut barley. These, when shelled and roasted, were the customary

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food of the reapers and gleaners ; the only addition to their simple meals being thin wheat cakes, dipped in sour wine as a relish, and clear water from the wells, brought by the young men for drink.

The day of which I tell Micah and his companions started for the harvest-fields in the dewy freshness of morning, going by the way of a path that led across a sunny stretch of cultivated land, yellow with the ripe grains.

Elisheba was radiant with health and beauty ; her simplest words were glad, like a song, as she tripped lightly between the olive-trees and the vines that bordered the path.

When they reached the sunny valley the air was musical with the murmur of the brooks and water-courses, and yet, although the pastures were so green and the water springs shining like stars—bright glistening eyes of that thirsty land—its eastern boundary almost touched the dreary plain.

Existence was simple according to Micah's kindly code, and he courteously greeted his work-people as he came among them, and they as cordially returned his good-will. Micah did not join the reapers, but he

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winnowed the grain after the younger men had threshed it out on the floor, laid in the open field. And he mingled freely with the people, and counseled them to remember that the kindliness enjoined by the law of Moses demanded: "When ye reap the harvest of your land thou shalt not wholly reap the corners of the field, neither shalt thou gather every grape of the vineyard; thou shalt leave them for the poor and needy."

Micah's friendly intercourse with his people was, however, soon interrupted. It so happened the elders of Gilead were holding local council in the neighborhood, and they claimed Micah's presence. And with the eager curiosity, and utter indifference to the loss of time, characteristic of the East, they insisted on hearing every detail regarding his brother Jephthah's repeated victories over the children of Ammon. Micah was well able to answer their questions, for daily a swift runner from the camp came with tidings for Elisheba, telling of her father's welfare and triumphs. In return the runner was wont to carry back to the mighty man news of his daughter and messages of her love.

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Micah was pleased to meet with the elders and to answer their questions ; the only hindrance to his entire satisfaction was the necessity it involved of leaving Elisheba alone among comparative strangers, for by this time Ozem was occupied at the far end of the harvest-field. Nevertheless it was a full hour after Micah's departure before Elisheba grew weary and lonely. Then she left the busy scene, and crossed the road and sat down to rest under the shade of an olive tree on the opposite bank.

## CHAPTER XVIII.

### LOVE HAILS LOVE.

THE retreat Elisheba found was peaceful and secluded, although so near to stirring life. It was very still, the shadow of the olive woods extended far ; there was no wind abroad, not even enough to stir a ripple among the leaves.

Elisheba was exceedingly lovely that hour. As she watched the busy gleaners she repeated the words Micah had so recently uttered in her hearing. The merciful spirit they inculcated had always been dear to her, imparting as it did the tender, pitiful feature to the harvesting, which gave it a distinctive color of intense religiousness, and she was quick to appreciate this.

The careful observance of this law by Micah's people indicated their loyalty to him as well as to the higher law of Jehovah. "And after all," Elisheba murmured—speaking half aloud, as was her habit when alone—"it is the Lord and not merely Uncle Micah who gives the poor and needy

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bread ; it is God who deals kindly with the widow and the fatherless and stranger, Uncle Micah only acts out the Lord's ordering.

As she thus pondered Elisheba was conscious that suddenly a shadow seemed to fall across the gladness that had filled her heart since early morning. She shivered slightly as she recognized that the emotion was as strong almost as a forboding of evil, and she felt as though touched by a chill wind as she remembered it was "the Lord also who tried the children of men, and from whose Hand affliction came out against them." Indeed, at times He dealt "very bitterly" even with those who loved Him. Elisheba had for years been familiar with this solemn truth, but why, sitting there in the shadow of the olive, with sunshine all about, did she now remember it with a personal application as never before? As far as she knew there was not a cloud in the sky of her future. And yet her thought was of trouble, and almost involuntarily she asked herself if the Lord Jehovah sent sorrow to try her trust in Him, would she have faith amid it all to remember He was still her Heavenly Father?

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Again as she thus questioned she spoke half aloud, and as she looked up—as though expecting to find a reply smiling out of the sky—she beheld Ozem. He stood between her and the blue, and seen from her lowly seat—at the foot of the olive tree—he seemed very tall, very beautiful, and noble.

Ozem had approached softly by a path behind Elisheba, and, although usually so keen to catch a nearing step, she had failed to hear his light tread on the yielding grass.

As her eyes met his they asked of him the question for whose reply she had looked heavenward.

But, although Ozem had heard her every word, he made no answer. He recognized the profound truth—so often missed even by the wise and good—that however much one may love another, faith admits of no proxy belief. Each individual soul must learn alone to trust and to know the Divine Friend and Protector, who is also Sovereign and Judge.

Ozem's silence was earnest and significant to Elisheba, and as she continued to look up at him a glory, fresh and beautiful, flooded his princely soul, and it was reflected in Elisheba's full heart.

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It was a sacred moment ; heart answered heart. They understood one another by that dearest, truest language by which soul knows soul. There was no need of verbal utterance.

Hence Ozem said no word, but he looked, and what he read in the clear true eyes raised to his own was enough—he asked for nothing more. After a moment Elisheba rose, and she drew a little back from him ; she lifted up her hands and hid her face in their open palms. But at the sound of Ozem's first spoken word she let them fall. She stood now as one transfigured, and the moments counted minutes, and the silence was about them as a holy, tender thing.

Not so much as the falling of a sun-dried leaf, the hum of a bee, or the flutter of a bird's wing stirred the air.

The hush remained unbroken until at last Ozem asked the question, which Elisheba answered in a voice clear and soft. "As long as life and its afterward"; that was what she said, and again it was enough—Ozem asked for no more.



## CHAPTER XIX.

### A DAY OF AMAZEMENT.

HAPPY hours count short. Ozem and Elisheba's idyl ended almost as soon as it began.

Suddenly, without preface of distant shout or blast of trumpet, the stillness was broken by the sound of the steady tramp of soldiers marching in orderly file. A minute later a company of fifty or more stalwart warriors, headed by Simon, came in sight on the public road at the east of Micah's field. As Elisheba caught sight of them she paled and then flushed. "It is of victory they will tell," she exclaimed; and, not heeding Ozem's remonstrance, she sped out of the shadow of the olive wood and stood awaiting their approach in the full blaze of sunlight that flooded the open stretch of field and road.

Yes, Elisheba was right, the warriors proclaimed victory. But it was only a partial victory, and therein lay the secret of their return. Before ascending the hill

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they had escorted Jephthah from the camp to the foot of Mount Mizpeh. His purpose was to offer a special sacrifice at the Watch-tower before he went forth to meet the children of Ammon in the decisive battle, that was to take place on the third day after the second quarter of the moon. It was after this battle that Elisheba looked forward to meeting her father on his return as a conquering hero—and it was then she had determined to be the first to greet him, according to the promise made when he left her, in obedience to the summons to appear before the elders. The reason Simon and the soldiers sought to enter Micah's village without their chief was simply due to Jephthah's desire to avoid calling attention to his presence until the time came for his final return in triumph. Hence it happened that Simon and his companions had travelled the last few miles by the high-road, while Jephthah had sought to reach his home by a secluded path.

Jephthah's movements were so secret, his brief visit was only known by the members of Micah's family, his own household, and the few attendants at the Watch-tower who served in the Sanctuary at the altar of

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sacrifice. The general impression was that Simon and the soldiers came for a fresh supply of the light arms used by the archers and bowmen; and this, in a sense, was true.

Simon immediately explained the circumstances to Ozem and Elisheba, and the need for secrecy regarding Jephthah's plans, and he told them that the chieftain expected to reach his home shortly before the hour when the men and women of the village would be coming home from their day's toil in the harvest fields, or from the sheep shearing going on at the sheepfolds of the upper pastures.

And then Simon had said that Jephthah looked to meet his daughter under the tamarisk tree by Micah's dwelling. After telling all there was to tell, Simon and the men of war had continued on their way. Meanwhile Ozem and Elisheba had hastened homeward, with no regard to the surprise their departure might cause Micah. In truth, Elisheba's only thought was of her father; she only thought that now she could tell him of her joy in Ozem's love, and Ozem had no thought that hour save of Elisheba.

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When they reached the dwelling, all was confusion for a while. With the eagerness of youth, Elisheba bade faithful Naomi hasten to prepare the pottage, and bitter herbs—her father's favorite dish. And she urged Ozem to go part way down the hill to meet the chieftain. But not one word of their love must he lisp; oh, no, Elisheba must be the one to tell that dear story to her father.

After Ozem had gone she put on the blue robe she had worn the day her father bade her farewell; she unbound the massive tresses of her dark hair, and let it flow about her shoulders and arms as her father liked to see it; she clasped the jewels he had given her about her neck, wrists, and slender ankles, and then with gliding motion, in which her shapely feet hardly seemed to touch the ground, she flew across the strip of short grass to the place of meeting, under the tamarisk. She had but just reached the spot when Ozem and her father appeared. And although Ozem was taller than most of the young Gileadites, and bore himself no whit less erect than Jephthah, the mighty man towered above him as they walked side by side, like some great oak by

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the side of a sapling. But Elisheba did not notice this; she was simply conscience of joy at again beholding her well-beloved father. As he advanced toward her, she bowed herself low before him on her face upon the ground, after the custom of her people.

Meanwhile to Jephthah she was as beautiful as the light of the morning when the sun riseth, even a morning without clouds; she was as lovely "as the tender grass springing out of the earth by clear shining after rain."

The dignity born out of conscience power, and a goodly degree of success, added royalty to Jephthah's bearing, while his swarthy countenance and flashing eyes were radiant with happiness at beholding his daughter, his darling, his pride, the love of his heart, the hope of his home.

As the chieftain folded Elisheba in his arms, Ozem silently stole away, and father and daughter were alone in the tender light of the ending day.

The emotions contending in Jephthah's mind kindled a heat in his soul which led him to greet Elisheba not with common speech or mien. Elisheba, too, was greatly moved, she hardly knew herself; it had in-

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deed been a day of amazement. Her father's return was so sudden, so unexpected. Ozem's acknowledged love was so wonderful, so beautiful to her, she felt like one awaking from a dream, and yet half doubted whether she were awake or asleep.

"Tell me," she whispered, "is it all true?" As she thus asked, her voice fell on Jephthah's ear sweet and welcome, like unto the falling of dew on the dry and thirsty earth, for Jephthah had missed his daughter; she was dear to him as his own soul.

As the moments passed, the joy of her presence in no way abated; her words continued to seem like notes of soft music, that murmur peace after turmoil.

Yes, all was happiness, peace, content, and sweet intercourse between father and daughter. Neither of them divined that hour was the gladdest and the proudest life held for either of them, for as yet no shadow rested on the present or fell aslant the future. As yet, although Jephthah's soul was afire with ambition, he had uttered no unhallowed vow. He and Elisheba, his innocent child, were still one in sympathy and the deep restful satisfaction of mutual trust and love. Her dear

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eyes could still meet with a smile the clear, fixed look with which he read her heart.

After a little she freed herself from the clasp of his arms, and sitting by his side, her hand held in his, she told of Ozem. As Elisheba uttered his name her dark eyes shone, her face became luminous, her whole nature was under the influence of a feeling that almost amounted to exaltation.

Jephthah listened and was glad. What brighter prospect could he ask for his daughter than marriage with a youth like Ozem, who would love his wife as never wife was loved in Israel; who was true to his father's faith and so upright, in word and deed, that his example shone like a star amid the murky night of the evil times that encompassed the youth of Gilead.

Her father's blessing and approval was all Elisheba needed to complete her happiness, and again she looked into his eyes with a smile, and after the habit of her childhood she laid her cheek to his cheek; she was too glad for words.

Later she spoke, but it was not then of herself nor Ozem, but of the victory she felt so sure would crown the decisive battle Simon had told her was pending.

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Her courage was so high, her confidence in her father's success so great that when—a few hours afterward—the parting time came, she gave no sign of emotion, save that Jephthah felt her fingers closed and contracted around his with a tender, clinging pressure. As they stood in the doorway, under the swinging lamp, he noticed also the color slowly faded out of her cheeks and lips, the light grew dim in her eyes, but she did not shed a tear. And yet in the silent night Elisheba wept, and she could not tell why when Naomi sought to soothe the sobs that shook the girl's slight frame, as a wind that sends a shiver among reeds and tall grasses by a brookside.

When morning came, Elisheba told Ozem of this sense of undefined trouble, that, like a wave from some unknown sea, had submerged the joy of her happy bygone day. Ozem said it was due to the influence of the sudden storm that soon after midnight had raged with fury for a brief time; but Elisheba knew that was not the cause of her distress, and again she wondered why she had wept, and then she forgot her tears, for Ozem's love, his comforting, spanned them with a rainbow



## CHAPTER XX.

### A RASH VOW.

THERE was no hint of that midnight storm when Jephthah parted from Elisheba. The day had been clear, the evening sky was starlit ; and the stars still shone in unclouded brightness when, two hours after leaving his daughter, Jephthah, accompanied by Micah and Simon, entered the court of the Watch-tower. The chieftain's object was to offer as a burnt-offering unto the Lord the first-fruits of the spoil he had already secured from the children of Ammon. And this intention was right and well-pleasing unto Jehovah. But alas ! even in the short time it took to pass from his home to the summit of Mount Mizpeh, a grievous thing happened ; the spirit of Evil—always on the alert to gain admittance—forced its way into Jephthah's heart. The test hour had come—as it must sooner or later to every soul—when the fight between man and the power of evil must be waged.

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The ordeal that was to try Jephthah centered around his desire to gratify his personal pride and ambition. And the moment he consciously put self first, and God second, like Nimrod of old, he sought to be even more than equal to the Ruler of Heaven.

"He desired to gain a great name, and to rule over the whole world"; and to become this, and to insure complete triumph over his enemies, he thought to win the Lord's favor by a vow, dark and mysterious. But it was not until after Jephthah had presented the thank-offering he had in mind when he parted from Elisheba that he made this promise to God of a special sacrifice,—“if without fail the Lord delivered the children of Ammon into his hand.”

It was a strange vow ; he knew the history of Abraham, and that while it proved that the followers of Jehovah were not behind the servants of Chemosh and Baal in self-surrender to their God, future generations were also taught by it that a limit had been fixed by God to the impulse of man to offer his costliest and best, while a sacredness had been stamped on human life. And yet, although Jephthah knew all

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this, he disregarded the spiritual element which in the sight of the Lord made all the value of burnt-offering and sacrifice. And in the excitement of the anticipated battle, and his eagerness for victory, he became as a man who turned his face backward, and voluntarily he bound his soul by a rash vow, that in its blindness was like the hideous idea of the earliest ages, when the desire to please, as they thought, the Divine Being led men to carry to extremes the institutions of sacrifice under the belief that the more precious the offering, the greater its acceptableness, until at length the custom resulted in the horrible practice of presenting human victims. Yes, Jephthah even ran the risk of such a terrible fulfillment of his pledge. For it was unconditional; there was no limit to the terms. It was, alas! too true. "Jephthah vowed a vow unto the Lord, and said, 'If Thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth first from the door of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the children of Ammon shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering.'"

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As Jephthah uttered these ill-advised words, Micah bowed his head and wept aloud, and, like a father pleading with a wayward son, he besought the chieftain to recall them now, while there was still time. He asked Jephthah how he dared to thus measure the greatness and mercy of the God of Abraham by the standard of the false gods of the heathen. What was he, a mere worm of the dust, to offer a reward, as it were, unto the Lord for granting him victory.

Despite Micah's earnestness, his remonstrance was of no more avail than a child's hand striving to stay the onward rush of a mighty torrent. Jephthah remained unmoved by even the vivid picture Micah drew of the possibility that some dear one might be the first to welcome his return, and thus fall a victim to his vow. It was no good pleading; the chieftain utterly refused to open his mind to the recognition of this danger. Micah's words were to him as an idle tale. He replied to them with haughty scorn, saying: "I have said, and so it stands." And this was the only answer he vouchsafed when to Micah's gentle pleading Simon added vehement remonstrance.

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Yes, Simon was vehement ; his face, usually so unmoved, glowed with wrath as he approached Jephthah with flashing eyes, demanding in a stern, loud voice the revokement of the rash vow.

Jephthah's resolute indifference to a peril so threatening roused still greater anger in the heart of the hot-blooded soldier, and he raised his clenched fist in menace. But before he uttered the bitter words that hovered on his lips he remembered his long years of companionship with his friend and chief; he remembered Jephthah's daughter, and his arm fell, the clenched hand relaxed. But his broad chest still heaved with his labored breathing, and though Simon's eyes were heavily shaded by thick overhanging brows, Jephthah could not fail to see the light of indignation that flashed in their fiery depth.

There was, however, no further remonstrance on either Micah or Simon's part, and silently the three men passed out of the Watch-tower. As the door closed behind them it seemed as though they beheld a new world, so marvelous was the change that had come over the aspect of nature during the brief time they had spent within the sanctuary. The sky an hour before so

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cloudless, so twinkling with the shine of stars, was now hidden by clouds that hung lower and lower every minute over the summit of the mount. The darkness was ominous, "the earth rocked and quivered," the pillars of the hills seemed shaken, as if conscious of the gathering storm, which rent the ashen-colored depths stored with lightning simultaneously with the sudden rush of the wind. And then the piled-up terror began to move, and the great mass of dark clouds seemed like unto "an avalanche of gloom seamed with fire." Then came the crash of the tempest, and "through the thick clouds there passed hailstones and coals of fire," while the deep roll of the thunder along the skies was as the voice of Jehovah, and again the lightning tore through the clouds, and hail and rain fell in torrents; and lo, as suddenly as it came, the rain ceased, the wind became a calm, the clouds rolled away, the storm was over and gone—where?

This manifestation of God's wondrous working amid the forces of nature had an entirely different effect upon Jephthah than either Micah or Simon expected. Instead of humbling him and filling his soul with

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shame, that he, a mortal man, had presumed to offer the Lord of heaven and earth a reward if victory were granted him, he saw in the storm only a type of himself pursuing his enemies, and smiting them to the earth as the rain and hail had beaten down flowers, brakes, and tall grasses. The wild blast of the wind was to him as their panic cry of flight. In the lightning he beheld the fierce gleam of flashing sword and lance. The deep roll of the thunder sounded to his ear as the mingled shouts of victory and wails of woe. This interpretation of nature's language so fired Jephthah's already kindled desire for self-aggrandizement that he scarcely heeded Micah's farewell words, and he was in such haste to rejoin his army that he refused to wait for the dawn of day.

Jephthah's zeal and confidence of victory proved contagious, and the company of soldiers who had acted as his escort were eager to accompany him back to the camp, and ready to follow him into the thick of battle and danger. Nevertheless Simon's brow was clouded, his heart was heavy. A great fear had taken possession of him ; he was like a man stricken with sudden age in the midst of full vigor ; the elasticity had

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gone from his step ; he muttered to himself  
fateful words ; his voice was harsh and  
hoarse from deep feeling. And yet, all he  
said was, " If it be Ozem—if it be Elisheba—  
Elisheba ! "



## CHAPTER XXI.

### ON TO VICTORY.

**D**URING Jephthah's absence the Gileadites had not been idle. They had engaged in more than one spirited skirmish with the enemy, and in each encounter the Lord had delivered the Amorites into their hands. These tastes of victory had so stimulated the soldiers they were hardly less eager than Jephthah for the coming battle, and they were so impatient for the morrow that his return was hailed with acclamations of delight.

The day rose blue and clear over the battle-field, and the appearance of the troops was in accord with the brilliant sunshine. A spirit of triumphant anticipation prevailed, and this surety of success was peculiarly strong among Jephthah's special followers.

As he looked at the army drawn up in line ready for battle, his heart beat with proud satisfaction in his own position as captain and leader of this brave united host, whose

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hearts were knit together as one man, in their fixed purpose to conquer or to die, and who were as ready to follow his lead as sheep to follow a shepherd.

Simon's was the only countenance that wore anything like a look of dismal forboding, and yet Simon was the bravest of the brave, and wont to be light of heart and friendly of mien.

But now he had the expression of a doomed man, and his usually hopeful soul was a captive to hopelessness. This sense of impending trouble kept him somewhat apart from the general gayety that was shared by even the hangers-on, who always congregate about a vast army. After a momentary contemplation of Simon's gloomy face, Jephthah turned and looked toward the camp of the foe. A stern joy mingled with haughty contempt blazed in his fiery black eyes as he studied the hostile troops. Yet he realized that they were no mean weak enemies, they were inspired by a courage equal to that felt by his own army. Jephthah's meditation was, however, soon interrupted; the hour had come when, according to custom, he as captain and ruler must appear before his soldiers

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with sacrifice and offering unto the Lord, preparatory to battle.

Jephthah was a striking type of an ideal chief and prince that day. He possessed every physical qualification important in a military leader. He was girded with bodily strength, his hands were trained for war, his sinewy arms were used to bending his bow of brass and to throwing his mighty spear with unerring precision. He was swift and sure of foot like a deer, and able, like the wild antelope, to scale the dizzy ledges of the cliffs and crags where part of the foe had fortified themselves. Hence he was equal not merely to smite, but to pursue his enemies.

When at length he addressed his army the fierce light of battle blazed through the rapid sentences which pictured the approaching conflict, and the final annihilation of the enemy.

In the fervor of anticipation—like King David in after years—he exclaimed: “I will pound them like dust before the wind, their power shall wither like a gathered flower before a hot wind; the fugitives shall creep trembling out of the holes of the earth, the caves where they hide themselves.”

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The utterance of these masterful words kindled Jephthah's ambition to still greater visions of conquest, and not knowing how hard a task he planned, and little dreaming of the bitter experience that awaited him, he grasped his sword, and again declared his resolve to use it for the destruction and terror of evil-doers, and in a still louder voice he added: "I will early destroy all the wicked in the land. I will cut off all wicked doers." But alas! in these resolves it was by the power of his own might he thought to conquer. "*I will*," thus he prefaced his intentions. Nevertheless he remembered Jehovah, as he chanted in clarion-like notes—that reached to the outmost rank of the troops—the words of Israel's war-cry: "The Lord hear thee in the day of battle, the name of the God of Jacob defend thee, send thee help from the sanctuary, strengthen thee out of Zion, remember all thine offerings and accept thy burnt sacrifices."

At these words the soldiers waved their standards in the sunshine, while a youth planted before the ranks of each division its banner, to be defended to the death. Meanwhile shouts rose from every file,

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rending the air with the cry, "In the name of the Lord we set up our banners."

When this wild acclaim died away, Jephthah repeated his expressions of satisfaction in the devotion of his soldiers, telling them that he accepted it as a token of victory, and again the air pulsed with the shouts of the multitude, as they repeated over and over, "Jehovah save! Let the king hear us in the day when we cry."

The echo of this mighty shout was merged in the long, loud trumpet blast, that sounded the charge that led forth to victory or defeat!

There is no need to dwell on the details of the battle. Jephthah possessed in a special degree the heroic spirit of the age, and that day he seemed endowed with superhuman power. His strength was prodigious; his courage a fearlessness that never failed; he was the terror of his enemies; the pride of his followers; he moved among them inspired by hope in the midst of dangers that would have vanquished any ordinary man. To insure greater freedom of action, he, and Simon likewise, early in the day laid aside their heavy armor, helmet and coats of mail

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and both men entered into the conflict with the dauntless indifference to personal peril that had been their habit during the years of their exile. From the beginning to the end of the battle Simon's gigantic form towered close by his chieftain's side. Jephthah was conscious of this; he knew Simon's brave soul never wavered in loyal watchfulness over him, and that many a time it was Simon's hand that warded off the deadly thrust of an enemy's spear. It was Simon, also, whose hand caught and stayed the course of the poisoned arrows pointed at Jephthah's heart.

At such times of danger averted did Jephthah remember Simon's remonstrance on the night of his rash vow?

The rays of the setting sun fell low on the scene of strife before the children of Ammon yielded the hard-won victory.

Then a sudden panic took possession of them, and with wild shouts they fled in dismay across the plain and into the recesses of the hills. And as they went they trampled under foot the dying and the wounded, they left their tents and their arms. Spearmen and archers surged after them in hot fury, hemming them in by the

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banks of the Jordan, and driving them ruthlessly down precipices and into mountain passes.

In the remorselessness of pursuit "they smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel."

While this ruthless pursuit was taking place in the open country, on the battle-field, "the people piped with pipes, and rejoiced with great joy, so that the earth rent with the sound of them." They vied with one another in songs of praise, as they proclaimed the mighty deeds of Jephthah, their captain, who had thus led them forth to victory.

Simon, among all the men of war, was the only one who refused to join in this universal triumph.

Jephthah, noting Simon's gloom, suddenly felt as though a cloud had come between him and the glory of success. As he turned to ask Simon the cause of his depression, the stalwart soldier passed swiftly through the crowd of warriors, who

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made way for him without asking why and where he went. Neither did Jephthah make any effort to discover. Indeed, Simon's departure relieved him from a presence that disturbed his composure, and he was eager without any drawback to hasten preparations for the army's victorious return to Mizpeh on the next day.

Presently darkness settled over the battlefield, and the soldiers scattered each to his own company, and very soon the camp was still, nothing moved beneath the stars, save the stealthy guard, who kept watch before the entrance of their captain's tent, from which a faint spark of light shone dimly.

Despite the quiet Jephthah could not sleep that night, or rather, when he slept, there was no refreshment in his slumber, for Elisheba's figure glided through his dreams like a restless influence. Her large eyes, tender and bright as stars, seemed to fill the dusky tent with an unearthly light, while they looked at him with a question in their dark depths.

Toward midnight his dream changed, and she seemed attired in white raiment, and her face was veiled, and her graceful figure draped in a misty cloud. Once he thought



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she asked for Simon, and once she bent toward him and kissed his forehead, but as his hand reached out to clasp her to his heart she vanished. At that dissappointment Jephthah turned upon his couch, and he awoke with a start. He slept no more that night, and he longed for the break of day.

## CHAPTER XXII.

### AN UNCONSCIOUS HERO.

**J**EPHTHAH'S victory over the children of Ammon was hardly an hour old when the swiftest of the trained runners—who made part of the army—was speeding across the plain, with his face set toward Micah's village, that Jephthah's daughter might be the first to hear the glad tidings.

For a brief time the messenger's rapidly receding figure was clearly defined against the golden light of the sunset sky, which lay close upon the border of the plain. Thus it happened that Simon's far-seeing eye caught sight of the runner, and straightway he divined his errand. It was this discovery that had caused Simon, without a moment's delay, to make his way through the unresisting throng that surrounded the victorious chieftain. But when it came to passing the outer circle of common soldiers, Simon's progress was somewhat delayed.

Unlike their superiors, they were reluctant to move aside at his bidding, and, as

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he pushed by them, they muttered between their bearded lips angry words. And then their displeasure gave place to wonder, as they beheld Simon's stern, sad face as he passed swiftly and unheeding the huge-limbed guard, that kept watch over the heavily chained company of captive Amorites.

By the time Simon reached the plain, the runner was so far in advance he seemed a mere speck against the horizon, in fact scarcely more than a flying bird, and at last he was entirely hidden by a sudden plunge into a dense wood, and before he emerged the darkness had deepened, and only objects near at hand were visible. Nevertheless, Simon continued his steady pursuit, save for one abrupt halt, during which a spasm of mortal agony stayed his steps. After that he sped on over rock and crag, up steep hills, and across valley and plain. He did not pause, even when he heard the rippling music of a water brook, and yet his lips were parched with thirst; not since midday had he tasted a drop, and then it was but a half-tainted quaff from the heated water-skin a kindly spearman had offered him.

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But, however great Simon's need of refreshment, he must not turn aside now, when every moment was of value. And with all his haste, would he be in time to save Elisheba?

Meanwhile the night shortened, the morning star grew dim against the sky, in the east the early dawn lit the summit of the hills, and birds began to twitter. And Simon was still a good way from Micah's village.

He counted the distance, and the time it would take to compass it; he knew just how long a poisoned arrow was in doing its deadly work—and he measured that too. And, even as he counted, the arrow's work was done.

For a moment Simon grasped the hilt of his sword convulsively, his heart was pierced by a pain such as he never before had felt, his mighty figure bowed forward, he fell, and lay prostrate on the ground.

It was thus, alone, in the gray light of dawn, after a life of two-score and ten brave, upright years, Simon, the trusty soldier, the loyal friend, passed—an unconscious hero—from "out the world of men into the world of shadow."

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One cry—"Elisheba! save Elisheba!"—and his voice had gone into silence; one mortal wrench of agony, and the struggle had ended.

And then a new day came, sunbeams stole through the opening tree-boughs; they played like smiles about the motionless soldier; they rested on his upturned face. It was as though the gates of Heaven swung wide open, as though Heaven had come close within his reach, and he had stepped across the threshold. And who knows but he had!

It was noon-time of the day before, when, in the thick of battle, Simon, raising his arm to ward off the thrust of a spear pointed at Jephthah's heart, had left his own heart exposed. A hundred keen-eyed enemies had seen that unguarded spot, and silently, swiftly, a hundred poison-tipped arrows cut the air—and one, aimed with unerring precision, accomplished its fatal quest. For a moment, as the sharp point pierced the yielding flesh, Simon had felt a sudden faintness, but with an effort only possible to a hero soul, he mastered the physical weakness. And he did not flinch

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again, although the pain was so great beads of perspiration stood out on his brow, and his lips were blanched, while the muscles of his mouth contracted.

The pain continued keen as the cut of a sharp knife through the remaining hours of the day and during the night. But stronger than pain, dearer than life, was the great longing that filled his noble soul with a mighty desire to prevent Elisheba's being the first to greet her father's triumphal return, and thus, the victim of Jephthah's rash vow. Simon knew the only way to accomplish this was by reaching Micah in time for him to warn Ozem of Elisheba's danger.

The hope of doing this gave Simon almost more than mortal courage. In truth, he was a hero, and yet he had never heard the word; he did not know its meaning.

But enough—he was too late! And yet, was he too late? Is any life wasted, any suffering too costly that teaches “what life shall be, what faith is, loyalty, and simplicity?”

## CHAPTER XXIII.

### THE UPPER SHEEPFOLD.

IT was a clear, beautiful morning, without cloud, when Abner—the runner dispatched by Jephthah—reached Micah's village. Every day since Jephthah's vow until that morning Micah had been on the watch for Abner. For Micah thoroughly shared the fear which had taken such a strong hold on Simon's mind. Then, too, both men felt the need of greater watchfulness from the fact that Jephthah, in his unreasoning self-will, had demanded of them a promise of secrecy regarding his vow; thus neither Ozem nor Naomi knew of the danger that threatened Elisheba, and the maiden was eagerly devising festive plans for her father's reception. She proposed herself to lead the procession of young girls, who with dances and timbrels were to meet the victorious army. It was fitting that Elisheba should thus plan. She was the fairest and the noblest of all the damsels in the sunny land of Gilead; she was Jeph-

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thah's only child ; "beside her he had neither son nor daughter."

In imagination Elisheba pictured every detail, and how, standing on the ledge of rock just outside the door of the house, and thus raised a little above the level of her companions, and quite above the advancing host, she would recite the song of welcome, the refrain to be caught up by the women and maidens, as singing and bending forward, their bodies keeping time to their songs, they danced in unison to the music of their tambourines, held one moment high over their heads and the next beat with their right hands. In honor of the occasion the skin disks of these instruments were to be hung with rows of shells and bits of metal, which would serve to add to the sound of joy. And then—as she, Jephthah's daughter, led the women down the steep path, the deep, solemn chorus of the men would join in the general praise, and loudest, and clearest of all the voices, Ozem's would sound. Oh, yes, Elisheba felt sure of that.

Micah knew of Elisheba's plans, and they served to increase his anxiety. He had watched her teach the village maidens the intricate steps of the dance with which the



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daughters of Israel were wont to celebrate victory, and more than once he had listened to the gay tingle of timbrels that blended harmoniously with the chords of Ozem's harp. He knew of the costly robe Naomi's skillful fingers had fashioned, that the chieftain's daughter might appear before him in queenly attire.

But in spite of his anxiety Micah was powerless to check these preparations. He was bound to silence by his pledge to Jephthah. All he could do was to prevent Elisheba from being the "first living thing" to greet the chieftain's return. In pursuance of this determination, he resolved to arrange that the moment Jephthah came in sight he would thrust before his eyes a harmless lamb from Elisheba's own flock—and surely a snow-white lamb would prove a suitable offering for the promised sacrifice.

By nature and habit Micah was simple and straightforward, but in this instance he devised a subtle plan, by which, unbeknown to Elisheba, he would entangle and swathe together the overhanging tree boughs and branches of the thicket that edged the narrow path, so that no exit

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would be possible ; the innocent victim would, in fact, be pressed onward by Elisheba's own eagerness.

To accomplish this, Micah knew he must be the one to catch the first sight of the runner from the camp, and this was why, day after day, he watched for Abner, the swift of foot.

But—oh—the seeming irony of circumstance ! alas, alas, all Micah's watchfulness proved in vain, all his plans failed, and it was only an unimportant, commonplace event that prevented them ! Nothing more than a passing trouble between a shepherd and a goat-herd, that occurred in one of the upper pastures. Micah was awakened from sleep to settle the difficulty, and he went forth with no more anxiety in his heart than the dull sense of forboding which had oppressed him ever since the night of Jephthah's rash vow. When Micah started it was still night in the world without, and then the morning dawned. The gray light became tinged with red. The air came in rippling waves from the hills. Then the sun rose, the world awoke, grass blades were tipped with dew-drops, flowers began to unfold their closed petals, and soon honey-bees

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were astir, from unseen places birds began to sing, wood-doves made sweet cooings among the olives, and a white eagle soared high in the air.

Influenced by his surroundings, and nothing loath to add his share of praise, Micah lifted up his voice in a song of confidence in Jehovah. "I will sing Thy praise, and shout aloud in the morning Thy mercy." As he repeated the words over and over, he little thought how sorely his faith would be tested before the shadow of the Watchtower stretched twice across Mizpeh's level mountain-top. Neither did he think of the nearness of the enemy, and the fact that twice within the past two days the children of Ammon, intent on overcoming the Israelites by stratagem, had been known to send out skirmishing parties ready to waylay anyone crossing the narrow strip of unprotected road that lay between the village and the pastures where Micah had his sheepfold.

Thus it happened, as he went on his way singing, Micah was suddenly confronted and overcome by a tall son of Ammon, who held him a close prisoner until near nightfall. Then the crafty Amorite, knowing of Jephthah's victory, thought

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only of his own safety and escape, and Micah was at last free, a weary worn-out man, to make his way back to the village.

But although faint and worn he did not lose hope and confidence till he was within a stone's throw of Jephthah's dwelling. Then a sudden wave of fear swept over him, impatience robbed him of courage. He began to think of the evil that might have befallen Elisheba during his absence. As he came nearer he caught a sound of trouble; he met men walking with bowed heads, and women, who wept aloud. At these signs of woe he stopped; his face became as the face of one dead; he dropped on his knees; he lifted his eyes and hands toward heaven.

When at last Micah arose and went toward the house, he had the look of a man who, in the struggle for submission, had wrestled with the Lord and won but a partial blessing; he had a dejected air, a hopeless expression, and well he might, for he knew the full import of Jephthah's vow. As he thought of it, his face twitched with agony, hot tears ran like rain down his cheeks, when he tried to speak it was in a trembling undertone and a faltering voice—for Micah loved Elisheba.

## CHAPTER XXIV.

### A DAUGHTER'S WELCOME.

THE day after the battle was as eventful to Jephthah as to Micah. He, too, was abroad early that morning. He was impatient to start on the triumphant march homeward, and his eagerness centered around the thought of his daughter's joy over his victory.

It was a proud hour for him when, in response to the notes of the trumpets, and the tramp of soldiers, he took his place as leader of the returning host. His enemies had been subdued; he had freed his land from their persecution; his army had been crowned with glory. Simon's absence was the only circumstance that interfered with the chieftain's entire satisfaction, for Jephthah had never been willing to admit that there was any danger pending from his vow. When, now and then, he had wondered who would be the first to come forth from the house on the rock to greet his return, he had said to himself surely it would

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be none other than some cringing slave, seeking thus to win favor, or perchance it would be a lamb decked by Elisheba's dear hands, and ready to offer as a sacrifice and burnt offering unto Jehovah. It was thus Jephthah shut the eyes of his mind and soul; and there is no blindness so dense as willful and fool-hardy pride.

When once the march began the men of war pressed forward with a zest that equaled their captain's.

Before they started, rumors had reached the camp of the general joyance that awaited their return, and how the princes, priests, elders, and people were alike ready to do them honor. A runner also arrived from Mizpeh, telling that from the hills far and near, and from the valley of the Jordan, the Gileadites were assembling, bringing with them gifts of corn, oil, and wine, and cheese from the milk of the goats, and fruits of the fig-tree and vine.

There were reports, too, of the singers and the players on stringed instruments, and of the dancing damsels playing on timbrels, as well as "of the men and women ready to dance and sing and play with all their might, even on harps and psalteries

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and on castanets and on cymbals." And it was Elisheba who had planned all the rejoicing! Elisheba, who had determined to make her father's return an event so striking, that traditions of it would linger for ages among the people of the tribe! And so they did and do, but, alas! in a remembrance all unlike Elisheba's bright visions of glory and gladness!

It was singular, in spite of all his resolute indifference to Micah and Simon's fears, when he caught sight of the Watch-tower, Jephthah felt for the first time a pang of terror, that pierced even to the marrow of his bones.

But so great was his pride and self-will, he refused to heed it; he put it aside; he would not let a shadow darken that day of victory!

But the shadow was deepening, all the same.

Meanwhile, in the deep quiet and seclusion of the olive wood, at the foot of Mount Mizpeh, Simon lay motionless in that sleep which knows no earthly waking. And on the hillside, in Micah's village, Naomi had been astir almost as soon as Micah started for the sheepfold. She was restless; all

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night her slumber had been disturbed, and, as soon as the morning mist began to lift, she hastened to the roof of the gate that led to the eastward entrance of the house. Shielding her eyes from the level rays of sunlight, she looked toward the plain. Thus it happened that Naomi was the first to catch sight of the runner from the camp, and instantly she knew he was the bringer of good tidings, for over his head he waved high an olive branch, the Hebrew token of victory.



## CHAPTER XXV.

"GOD'S IN HIS HEAVEN."

NAOMI did not lose a moment in passing the glad news on to Elisheba. And as swiftly as lightning flashes from east to west, the report spread from house to house, until every inhabitant of the village was eager with excitement. "Victory" was the word repeated by old and young; joy beamed on every face; gladness pulsed in every heart, and gladdest of all was Jephthah's daughter.

In the confusion and zeal to forward the preparations for greeting the victors, strange to relate, no one remembered to dispatch a messenger to recall Micah. Ozem thought of it, so did Naomi, but they left it undone, supposing some member of Micah's immediate household had already been sent to acquaint his master with the tidings.

As for Elisheba, she had but the one idea, and love lent wings to her deeds. Hence before the shimmer of shield and spear sparkled in the distance, she was ready to

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welcome the returning conquerors, standing in the doorway watching for their coming.

Naomi had spared no pains in decking Elisheba for the occasion. She had bound in with the maiden's dark hair threads of shining jewels; she had dressed her in the robe of costly stuff. It was of snow white, broidered with delicate branch work of lily bells, and stars, and crescent moons, a robe all unlike the simple attire Elisheba was wont to wear.

It, and the jewels, had made part of the spoil Jephthah had secured during the years of his marauding life, when he had levied impost from many a hostile band and caravan, who were glad to pay the price of freedom by yielding up their treasures of jewels and costly stuffs.

The robe became Elisheba well, and as she donned it the sun that shone through the open casement smiled on the Hebrew damsel. The unaccustomed sound of the rustling robe caused her to pause when half-garmented, and she thought of her bridal morning, when again she would wear this beautiful raiment. For a moment she stood—held spell-bound by the thought—with her arms uplifted, while her hands toyed with

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the jewels she fastened in her dark hair. Her lithe figure, clothed in white, looked like some tall flower. After a little she lowered her arms, and clasped the remaining gems about her neck, wrists, and delicate ankles, where they slipped down to the straps of the golden sandals with which her feet were shod. And then she had passed into the outer room where Ozem awaited her. There was a soft brightness in her face, a look of joy, love, and triumph, more beautiful than all the sparkle of the gems, although they shone like fireflies, as she moved before Ozem and Naomi in the measure of the dance in which she expected later to lead the virgins of the village.

She moved in slow curves, in which feeling and action seemed to flow and mingle into one; swifter motion followed and widening circles. Ozem, impelled by sympathy, caught her mood, and he took his harp and touched the strings, thus filling out the full harmony of motion and sound.

When Elisheba ended the graceful dance, Ozem playfully crowned her regal head with a wreath of blue flowing myrtle Naomi had twined; and then it was that Elish-

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eba had taken her place in the open doorway, with Ozem by her side. As she stood watching for the first sight of the returning army, her bright eyes flashed, and her beauty was equal to the beauty of a dream. None who saw her ever forgot it; and to Ozem—but why try to tell Ozem's love and admiration?

The sun was high in the heaven before the army appeared, and then they were so near, but one turn in the road prevented Jephthah and his daughter from standing face to face. Only one turn—and Ozem knew naught of her danger; Jephthah scorned to recognize it; Micah was a prisoner; Simon lay dead in the shadow of the olive wood. And not a voice was raised in warning; not a hand was stretched forth to save Elisheba.

And yet, yet, then as now,

“God was in His Heaven,  
All was right with the world.”

Then as now,

“This confidence amends for all;  
That Heaven repairs what wrong earth's journey  
does.”

## CHAPTER XXVI.

### LOVE'S INSTINCT.

**S**WIFTLY the conqueror approached. Only a moment now, and Jephthah would see his daughter, Elisheba her father!

Like a winged creature the maiden sped across the sunlit stretch of short grass that led to the rocky ledge from whence she would be the first to greet his return. "All eyes were with her as she moved, all hearts leaned to her," but only Ozem's felt the weight of love.

As shadows following sunshine, close behind her flocked the white-robed virgins, their hair flowing in the wind, their slender arms waving high the tinkling timbrels, to the music of which their feet danced over the ground. And then the tinkling music ceased; Elisheba's voice, rich and full, sang the opening words of the song of welcome. And then—she saw her father's face, and the sight hushed the song upon her lips.

For a moment it was as though they two

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—father and daughter—were the only man and woman on God's earth. Elisheba was only conscious of the sudden darkening of his brow; she saw only the sudden look of anguish in his deep-set eyes—and Jephthah saw no one but Elisheba, with the glory like daybreak shining on her face—and then he remembered, and he rent his clothes and cried aloud in bitter agony: "My daughter—oh, my daughter!"

The sound of his voice was like a wail of woe, terrible beyond endurance. As she heard it, Elisheba stood motionless as one who meditates some subtle purpose in a dream. After a moment she seemed slowly waking, and then a wonderful thing happened. By the divine instinct of love, Jephthah's daughter seemed to know the secret of her father's grief, and although by nature she was timid as a dove, she suddenly became bold as a lion. Her step did not falter; she hastened to his side; she touched his arm; she kissed his hand. And again she lifted up her voice, not to sing—oh, no! not to sing—while with utterance singularly sweet and soothing, and the simplicity of a child—although all the women quivered at her lips—she said: "My father

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if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord, do to me according to that which has proceeded out of thy mouth."

The chief men of war, the common soldiers, the elders of the tribe, and the women and children, the strangers and the captives, all heard Elisheba's words. And Ozem heard—and not one voice remonstrated. It was written in the book of the law: "According to the vow which he vowed, so must he do." And Moses had declared that a child was the father's property, and that parental power was absolute, even to life and death. And what was there to say, when, in reply to Elisheba, Jephthah proclaimed the direful import of his vow, saying: "Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low; thou art one of those that trouble me, for I have vowed a vow unto the Lord, and said: If Thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into my hands, then it shall be that whatever cometh forth first at the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the children of Ammon shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering." And with a bitter cry he repented the fatal words. "Alas! my daugh-

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ter, I have opened my mouth unto the Lord, and I cannot go back."

Truly, there was no return. Jephthah's own self-will had shut tight the door of escape; his own pride and ambition had barred and bolted it. His soul was in the presence of the dire consequences wrought by the evil of striving to purchase a favor of the Lord by linking the granting of it with a special service, or condition, of man's devising.

This inner consciousness of sin did not spare him—remorse never does; it revealed the subtle working of evil, and he knew it had not been the glory of God he had in mind when he made that vow. He knew it was self-aggrandizement he sought, and that the act which had resulted in his loss of singleness of purpose in serving the Lord consisted in the unwarranted pledge of an offering, to be observed by the performance of a religious rite.

Yes, Jephthah's sin was the assertion of self. Like Saul, at a later time, he remembered, when "too late," that to be strong one must obey.

As the sequel of his folly in dictating to Jehovah flashed with its hideous conse-



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quence before the "mighty man of valor" again he rent his clothes, and cried aloud: "Alas! my daughter—my daughter!"

This bitter cry thrilled the heart of every hearer, and Jephthah could say nothing else, except as he repeated it he was dumb with misery.

Presently, without resistance, he let Elishaba lead him up the steep path to the house on the rock, and together, father and daughter, entered the open door.

All through this strange scene, this sudden turning of joy into grief, and shouts of victory into wails of woe, Ozem had stood like a man suddenly paralyzed. His eyes never stirred from their fixed look at Elishaba. Only as she led her father toward the house did he begin to regain his wonted energy. Then, as she came near him, his heart gave a great bound, the blood leapt to his forehead; he saw the tears and the tremble about her lips. No wonder Ozem felt a wild temptation at that moment to catch her in his arms, to flee with her to the hills, to hide among the crags and caves and tangled underwood—anywhere, to escape the fearful vow. As Elisheba met Ozem's look she read the longing in his

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eyes. But although her heart was well-nigh broken for love of him, and for her father and herself, she stayed his impulse by an answering look, and even at that hour of supreme grief the light of peace shone in her eyes. All who beheld her remarked it and marveled, and Ozem most of all.

## CHAPTER XXVII.

### A BITTER DAY ON MOUNT MIZPEH.

**V**ERILY that was a day of trouble on Mount Mizpeh and in Micah's village. Calamity followed calamity. The people had not rallied from Jephthah's terrible vow and Elisheba's sad fate, when, just before the night closed in, a stranger came running into the village, asking for Jephthah's dwelling. The man's garments were rent, ashes were on his head, his appearance told of woe.

Micah, although still bewildered with grief and his powerlessness to save Elish-eba, came forth to greet the newcomer, who straightway bowed low to the earth. And then, in a broken voice, he told how, on his way to the yearly grape-gathering at his father's vineyard, he had turned aside from the public road, seeking a shorter path through the olive wood, and came all unexpectedly upon the prostrate figure of a soldier.

At first—thus the stranger said—he

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thought the silent form sleeping, but as he came close he knew it was the sleep of death.

Then followed a description of the soldier's gigantic size, his broad chest, huge limbs, and look of mighty prowess. All who heard knew it could be none other than Simon, for whom Ozem and Micah had already inquired anxiously.

At this knowledge again the air was rent with wails of woe. Strong men wept, and women moaned as with one voice they cried aloud: "How are the mighty fallen and the weapons of war perished."

Jephthah and Elisheba heard this fresh sound of lamentation even though the door of their dwelling was tight shut, and when they knew its cause they also wept and moaned over this added grief, which darkened even the already black hour of their full measure of anguish.

Later, the stranger led the way to the spot where Simon had fallen; he was accompanied by Ozem, Micah, and many of the men of war, strong spearmen and archers and common soldiers. They were a sorrowful company; their heads were bowed, their hearts were heavy, as silently they trod the rough path.

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When they came to the place Simon lay just as he had fallen. There was no mystery about his death. The wound in his heart told where the poisoned arrow had entered ; his sudden departure after the victory was explained. The people knew of his love for Elisheba, and that from her babyhood she had been dear to him, almost as if she were his own child. Hence it was natural that he should have hastened to tell her of her father's triumph ; it was natural that he longed to see her once more before he died. But as Ozem and Micah heard the men of war repeating one to another these facts, they knew there was still a stronger desire that had impelled the wounded warrior to seek his chieftain's daughter, before that chieftain's return.

Jephthah, too, when he looked at the calm resolute face of his dead friend and soldier companion, knew the true object of Simon's brave act. Yes, Jephthah knew Simon's true, loyal soul, and that his struggle with bodily pain, his heroic effort to reach Mount Mizpeh, were due to the determination to save Elisheba from the consequence of her father's vow !

And yet, while Jephthah, Micah, and

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Ozem knew this truth, they made no public announcement of it. They remembered that Simon was not a man who craved public praise. It was more in accord with his grand, simple nature, that but few should know of his brave desire. In itself the deed was enough. The effort remained ; it would fructify and bear fruit—brave deeds always do ; they are ever the parents of braver deeds, just as “hero sire descends from hero sire.”

But, while no ostentatious observance proclaimed Simon's devotion to Jephthah and his daughter, Ozem and Micah gave him a chieftain's burial. The night was still and starlit when strong men bore him to the cave in the field, to the north of Micah's vineyard. It was not more than half a mile from the Watch-tower ; it was almost within the shadow of the sanctuary.

When the last solemn rite was over, the mourners, headed by Elisheba and her father, turned away from the new-made tomb, and as they went they wept softly ; there was no outcry of grief until the midnight air was startled by a voice blown through a trumpet, and shouting aloud, “Simon is dead. He is dead. Blessed be

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the warrior of Gilead. Simon the strong, the virtuous, the true."

As the voice ceased, all was still again, the night wind sighed, the speechless men and women crept away each to their own home or tent on the camping ground. But their sorrow had not ended. The people of Gilead fasted for Simon seven days, and at set of sun each day they wept aloud, as they repeated the words of that midnight shout: "How have the mighty fallen. Simon is dead. He is dead. Blessed be the warrior of Gilead. Simon the strong, the virtuous, the true."

## CHAPTER XXVIII.

### FLEE AS A BIRD TO THE MOUNTAIN.

**D**URING the days of fasting for the dead hero none save Ozem and Micah entered Jephthah's dwelling. With every passing hour his misery increased, and he maintained a gloomy silence and refused to be comforted.

Nevertheless, he was not as unobservant as he seemed. He heeded every word Ozem and Elisheba said as they talked softly, and their words sank into his heart like seed, and took root, and bore fruit later on.

Yes, Jephthah heard Ozem interpret for Elisheba's solace the character of Jehovah—Abraham's God. He heard the reply to the maiden's trembling question: "Hath the Lord as great delight in burnt-offering and sacrifice as in obeying the voice of the Lord?"

Jephthah heard also Ozem's assertion



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that to present the sacrifice of a life, devoted to serving the Lord would fulfill his vow as truly as if Elisheba's young beautiful body were offered on the altar within the court of the sanctuary. And then Ozem defined the true meaning of a living sacrifice—a broken and a contrite heart, and that the place service filled in this higher conception consisted in the possession of a spirit, willing and ready to help, comfort, and bless others, even when the joy had gone out of the comforter and helper's own life.

The influence these conversations exerted on Jephthah's mind inclined him to grant his daughter's request, when she said to him: "Oh, my father, let this thing be done for me: let me alone for two months that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity." And he said "Go, and he sent her away for two months."

As for how Elisheba passed those days, "What lay in that unfolded flower of time" we may not know. But human hearts were the same then as now, and it is not difficult to imagine what must have been her occu-

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pation. Surely the days began and ended with prayer. Surely Elisheba,

“Leaning on God, remembered how He loved  
Jacob in Syria when He fed the flocks  
Of Laben, and what miracles He did  
For Abraham and for Isaac at their need.”

Surely as “she went up and down upon the mountains,” she realized despair was not the end of woe. Meanwhile she humbled her soul “by fast and prayer,” and by every outward sign of mourning that gave expression to her inner feelings. It was thus she gathered courage to meet the future; it was thus the darkness that encompassed it became spanned by hope. She was only a simple Hebrew maiden, but her soul responded to a love higher than mortal love, dear as that was, and she was lifted above fear, and the pressure of outward disaster. This was the secret of Elishaba’s composure. Had Ozem been with her he would have understood, but Micah’s daughters—who had accompanied Elisheba to the hills—could not comprehend it, and Elisheba did not know how to explain this upholding peace, but she rested in it!

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Love was the word before her mind morning, noon, and night. It shone like a star in the Book of the Law Ozem had given her just before they parted, and in which he had taught her to read: "I am the Lord thy God showing mercy unto them that *love me*."

"The Lord thy God proveth thee, to know whether ye *love* the Lord, with all your heart and all your soul." "*Love* the Lord thy God and obey His voice, that thou mayest cleave unto Him, for He is thy life."

As Elisheba pondered these words more than once, she wondered did Love and Law always go thus hand-in-hand in Jehovah's leading, and dealing with His people.

And so the two months passed; and during them Elisheba had so far learned lessons of trust and patience, she was almost ready for the new discipline the slowly revolving revelation of God's purpose was preparing to unfold. And sorrow was still to continue the appointed interpreter of her young life and its mystery.

During the weeks of absence Elisheba had been entirely cut off from any tidings of her father, Ozem, and Naomi. Hence she had no knowledge of her father's deci-

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sion regarding the fulfillment of his vow. She only knew she returned as she came, submissive to his will ; she was not afraid to look forward, whatever it might bring—she had first looked *upward*.

In accordance with the custom—during the summer—of the people of Gilead, Elisheba and her companions started on the homeward journey just before the falling of the night. They made such good progress, when the sun rose they had reached the place where the two roads that led to Micah's village met. Micah's daughters took the direct public route, but Elisheba chose the narrow, steep path that led to the rocky ledge on which her father's house was built.

The two months had wrought a change in her appearance, but she was none the less lovely to look at, although something akin to the severity apt to accompany a strong resolve had set its seal on her mobile face. Her dress, too, was the same as when she went forth. She still wore the rough ashen-hued robe in which Naomi, with so many tears, had clothed her on the sad day of departure. The folds of the mantle and the edges of her short skirt were now, alas,

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frayed and torn, and her feet were bare and tanned. The firmness of her step as she climbed the rocky path plainly told that she had become accustomed to treading rough ways. But she had not lost her grace of figure or motion, and, despite the pallor of her face, it was easy to see that to her father, Ozem, and Naomi she would seem as beautiful as when she left them.

Nevertheless, it was a different beauty; suffering had left its subtle trace; something more than is wont to be found in a maiden's face looked from her dark eyes. She had met the sorrow of her life, and it was reflected in their clear depths. She had gone among the mountains to bewail her virginity, and it meant more to her than the solitary life the words ordinarily represent.

Elisheba had been carefully trained by Naomi; she had been told of the hope cherished by many a Hebrew maiden. And in her pure soul she held that hope as the most sacred, holy desire of her life.

But now, although the Lord's promise of the Messiah was still the glory of Israel, for Jephthah's daughter the hope of that holy maternity was forever at an end.

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This was a bitter trial to Jephthah, as well as to Elisheba, and all the more bitter to him because "his own rash vow had annulled the hope as well as destroyed his only chance of perpetuating his race and name."

As Elisheba came within sight of her home, she realized that but a few hours now separated her from the time when she would hear the sentence that fixed her doom. Her devotion to the right was so supreme, she had determined to accept it without a murmur, even if the verdict demanded that for the honor of God, and the satisfying of her father's conscience, she must be offered on the altar of sacrifice.

But at the thought of what that meant her courage failed. Pausing in her hurried walk, she fell on her knees on the hard ground, and cried aloud unto Jehovah for help and strength to meet the trial, whatever it might be.

This brief time of supplication calmed Elisheba, and as she resumed her hasty walk she almost smiled, as she said softly to herself: "As at first, so again I will say, 'father, here I am, do to me according to that which has proceeded out of thy mouth; I am dear, but let God be dearer.'"

## CHAPTER XXIX.

### JEPHTHAH AND OZEM.

JEPHTHAH and Ozem's experience during the two months of Elisheba's absence had been very different. Jephthah suffered without intermission, as people do who have little imagination, few strong passions, and a constant nature. Whereas Ozem, although no less constant and intense in his love for Elisheba, was able by a more active mind and a firmer faith to lend almost a beauty to a misfortune illumined by the belief that this mortal life was not the limit and end of existence.

Then, too, Ozem's heart was free from the pangs of remorse which seemed to shut out all hope from Jephthah, whose soul was rent with an agony for which there was no comfort.

It well-nigh broke his heart to think of his darling "going up and down upon the mountains," toward which from childhood she had looked with fear and dread of their stern, majestic, bleak summits and rocky

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defiles. And when from these thoughts he turned to anticipate her return, he was met by a still sadder prospect. And he—her father—had caused all this misery! No wonder his grief seemed to him a sorrow beyond all other sorrow; no wonder his thought circled from Elisheba to Elisheba; no wonder his stricken heart suffered an agony only God's eye could see. Outwardly he was like a man overcome by a fatal lethargy. He seemed paralyzed, so far as making any mental effort. Day after day he sat with bowed head and covered face; it was as if his heart were frozen. In vain Ozem spoke in a tender way; Jephthah paid no apparent heed—and yet he heard every word. For years he had been a good man, according to the light of his dark age. Not until he yielded to the fatal mastery of ambition and pride did he become reckless and precipitate. It was not until after the utterance of his unholy vow that he sank back into the bondage of his early creed, in which zeal for God had been darkly mingled with heathen ideas. He had been, too, a strong man, a resolute character. But he became weak; it seemed for a time as though he had fallen a hope-



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less victim to a fierce superstition, which impelled him to think of nothing but the frightful deed attached to the literal execution of his vow. And yet, even then, a higher power was quietly working in his soul. It was not, however, until just before Elisheba's return that he became conscious of this spiritual influence, this Divine guidance, which—as it seemed to him—led him to decide in a moment the question he had been pondering all the weeks when he had held himself apart from human companionship. I simply relate the facts of the sudden change that came over his soul without attempting any explanation; for there is a mystery in these experiences, these sudden transformations of our innermost souls, which it is not well to try to unveil even to ourselves, and which it is impossible to unveil when they take place in another's soul.

Afterward, when Jephthah tried to explain it to Ozem, he could only tell how all his life long he had been subject to dreams (that were like visions), when he was on the eve of some momentous event in his life. It had been so the night after the victory, and on the night that prefaced his recall by the elders, and now again he had dreamed

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a dream of such solemn import it became to him as a message from the Lord.

As the short twilight of the East was giving place to night he sank into a deep sleep, and in that sleep, lo! "a horror of great darkness fell on him." He seemed far away from the place he knew so well; he was in the midst of a dreary, barren waste. He heard words disclosing the future suffering to be borne by Elisheba, his daughter, his love, his darling, and he was powerless to avert her doom! And then the scene changed. It was dark; not a ray of light illumined the gloom. A scorching heat beat upon him; he was a lost man wandering to and fro, vainly seeking rest, and, despite the darkness, he knew the place to be none other than the lepers' village, situated in the south country, beyond the Jordan. And then still another change; suddenly the blackness of darkness was strangely broken; Jephthah beheld "a smoking furnace and a burning lamp," the symbols of the presence of the God of Abraham. And in keeping with the brightness he heard a voice, and before his mental vision, like jewel links in a gem-set chain, passed the words Ozem had uttered

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in his presence—first to Elisheba and later on to Micah—explaining the meaning of the sacrifice well pleasing unto the Lord, and they pointed toward a way of escape from the actual penalty of shedding the blood of his darling in satisfaction of his vow. But still a terrible doom awaited her; the horror of it was so great it snapped Jephthah's dream asunder, and he awoke with a mighty groan. And yet his decision was made, an unseen force had impelled him to it, even while he knew to the mind of the ordinary Hebrew Elisheba's fate would seem as sad, as terrible, as death upon the altar of sacrifice. Nevertheless, in Jephthah's vision it had been as though the window of Heaven opened, and without reasoning, without argument, he knew the sacrifice God required of him and his daughter was something nobler than bloody sacrifice; he knew, because of her faith in the Lord Jehovah, his innocent child was chosen to consecrate the sacrifice of *self* to the cause of *Right*, as the highest and noblest offering God can accept. And that thus she should set the seal of condemnation by her pure example to the inhuman sacrifice of the ancient ceremonial law.

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Belonging, as Jephthah did, to a nation whose faith was national, even his dream was pervaded by a representative coloring; the personal element went hand-in-hand with the national claim for justice, and he felt the sacrifice of Elisheba must have an out-reaching, social purpose to answer its object. "We cannot find the true point of view from which to judge much of the morality of the Old Testament, unless we constantly recur to this socialistic character of the people of Israel, and remember how foreign our accentuated individualism is to the entire conception of life and its blessing in which the Hebrew thought moved." Hence Jephthah's determination to give his daughter as a sacrifice that would benefit a large class of his people was natural, even though it meant a death in life, and to accomplish this he proposed to give her, the young, slight girl, so tender and so softly beautiful, as a victim of a life-long mission service among the unfortunate outcasts banished to the leper colony between Mount Hermon and the Dead Sea.

Bitter and revolting as Elisheba's existence would be, Jephthah knew his daughter, he knew her unselfish heart, and that

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even amid the misery she would find consolation in a life spent in comforting others. But what a life it would be! As Jephthah thought of it his soul was afire; he was well-nigh in the way of bribing God again. And even while the inner sense of his mind and spirit were intent on accomplishing what had been disclosed to him, all the father in him quivered with agony. All this was as far removed from Ozem's experience as the north is from the south. For a brief time after Elisheba's departure for the hills, Ozem had gone about speechless with grief, and there was a sacredness in his sorrow into which but few could enter. But his faith was too strong; life and its opportunities for serving God and man too real for him to yield to his desire for silence and to be alone. Meanwhile, although he resumed his early occupation, and cared for his father's flocks, sorrow worked its will on his appearance. It soon became evident that while his brow was still smooth, the light in his eyes undimmed, "all the joy, the mirth, the sunshine of youth's golden dream had vanished." And in their place the gray twilight that belongs to sorrow and age had

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come before their time. Every detail told of this; his curling locks of light hair, fragrant with spikenard and balm, no longer flowed over his shoulders; now it was cut short to his brow. And in place of his former princely attire he now wore the rough garb of a shepherd. His eyes, while they still glanced kindly on the women and little children, had a far-away look; his face was noble, his manner gracious, but only as one who had missed his youth and the gladness of early manhood.

Ozem soon felt the life of a shepherd would be too narrow a sphere for the future, but during the two months that lay between Elisheba's home-leaving and the satisfaction of Jephthah's vow it afforded a quiet time in which he could plan. The fact that he suffered caused his noble heart to yearn to help the suffering, and he felt a God-given power to do this. He possessed extraordinary independence of mind, and "with the instinct of a profoundly religious nature, he saw that the one condition of national rejuvenation was the revival of a healthy moral and spiritual tone in the people at large; he perceived, also, that the first step must be individual repentance of

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past sins and future loyalty to Jehovah." Ozem knew such a revolution in the inner life of a people could only be accomplished by slow degrees. But he had the courage and moral greatness necessary for such a work, and from amid the ruin which had befallen his own hopes for earthly happiness he determined to undertake the task of enforcing the teaching of the Law, as the standard of obligation, toward God and man, and its denunciations of idolatry as a crime against the invisible King of Israel.

That he might better fit himself for this sacred work, he decided that, after hearing Elisheba's fate, he would return to the community of holy men, with whom he had already spent some time. It was only just beginning to be the custom for the Hebrew youths to thus gather about the learned men of the nation. The special "School of the Prophets" which Ozem proposed to enter was located on the hill of Ephraim, at Bethel.

As he thought of Elisheba's return, he anticipated the comfort it would afford her to find his life was not aimless, because henceforth joyless and bereft of her dear companionship. Knowing, as Ozem did,

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the high place living to bless and help others filled in her aspirations, he was assured, even though she might not be able to grasp all his plans, she would understand their spiritual significance, for she had the clear spiritual vision promised the pure in heart.



## CHAPTER XXX.

### ELISHEBA'S RETURN.

IT had been decided by the elders of Israel that the day following Elisheba's return, she must accompany her father to the Watch-tower, and that in the judgment hall in the sanctuary, in the presence of Nahum, the priest, and the chief men of the tribe, Jephthah should then proclaim his daughter's doom.

Ozem and Elisheba knew this, and the thought of it was uppermost in Elisheba's mind as she approached her father's dwelling.

But an hour after mid-day, when she crossed the threshold and entered the familiar place, for a moment she forgot. All the weary by-gone days seemed like a fearful dream, from which she had awakened to live again the dear happy life of the past.

And then—she was folded in her father's arms, and Ozem came, and Naomi, and the joy of meeting blotted out the misery of

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the parting, and every trace of suffering vanished from her face. For a brief time Jephthah and Ozem also forgot. The sight of Elisheba was so good to them, her presence so dear—but—all too soon they remembered.

Micah's step sounded without, and even before he entered they knew his errand, and that he had come, sent by Nahum, the priest, to tell the hour appointed for their appearance the next day at the Watch-tower.

It was the second after sunrise, and to reach Mount Mizpeh in time they must leave Micah's village by dawn. The time of departure was not long in coming. The stars were still shining dimly when the sad company of broken-hearted men and women set forth.

As on the fatal day of her father's victorious return from battle, Elisheba had been robed in white, so now—although of a very different texture—she appeared white-robed and white-veiled. But, alas, the contrast between that by-gone day and the present sad morning was as great as the difference between life and death. Then, in all the exuberance, all the omnipotence of youth

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and beauty, modest above all the maidens of Israel, and of a compelling loveliness of presence, she had led the dance, she had sung as only the pure in heart can sing, and now—the same pure heart was still Elisheba's—but how changed all else !

## CHAPTER XXXI.

### THE FULFILLMENT OF JEPHTHAH'S VOW.

WHEN the little company entered the Watch-tower it was already thronged with a concourse of people who had assembled from far and near. And they all marveled as they beheld the look of peace on Elisheba's face, which was still so beautiful, for while the brilliant loveliness of youth and joy had gone, that which was better and more abiding had come in its place.

But even though this beauty reflected from her pure true heart imparted an added loveliness to Elisheba's expression, even though she could and did trust in the Lord, Jehovah, her heart fainted within her as she waited to hear the words which were to seal her fate for this world.

Intense excitement pervaded the vast multitude that pressed into the judgment hall, the people were so eager to hear Jephthah declare the manner by which he had determined to fulfill his vow.

And the excitement increased when he

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proclaimed his decision, and consigned his daughter to an existence devoted to alleviating the suffering lepers of the tribe.

Verily it was a fearful doom. The lepers were a class of human beings afflicted in a way not only most abhorrent to a sensitive maiden like Elisheba, but most repellent also to the Jewish mind.

For years the feeling of the children of Israel had been thus intense against leprosy. They regarded its appearance among them as a degradation and reminder of their fathers' slavery to the Egyptians, for it was a disease born in Egypt along the borders of the Nile. Then, too, the sequel to Jephthah's sentence was most pitiful; it involved, sooner or later, certain death from the same terrible loathsome disease.

No wonder as Jephthah announced his daughter's doom his courage failed, and although "a mighty man of valor," he lost all power of self-control; sobs struggled in his heaving chest; he wept aloud; he spoke bitter words that ended with the cry: "Oh, God, why was I born to taste this woe!"

Elisheba was hardly less agitated. As she heard her father's decree she suddenly

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paled ; her lithe figure became rigid and statuesque.

When at last she moved she turned away from Jephthah with drooping head; her arms hung nerveless by her side. But after a minute she remembered that word in the Book of the Law—Love. “And now, what doth the Lord require of thee, but to fear the Lord thy God, to walk in all His ways, and to *love* Him, and to serve Him with all thine heart and with all thy soul.” This thought of service was like the soothing touch of a tender hand in the midst of Elisheba’s grief. Still, although she submitted to her fate, it did not follow that she was straightway reconciled to it. God did not demand that. He never demands it from any of His suffering children.

It was enough that Elisheba accepted her trial without a murmur, but not without a struggle. For what is spiritual or any other victory worth unless it cost a struggle?

As the full import of Jephthah’s vow became known, the wild cries of the people assembled within and about the Watch-tower rent the air, and mingled with the wails of mourning women sounded the

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harsh voices of men, as they uttered threat and menace. As Elisheba caught the meaning of these imprecations, she realized her father was in danger, and all thought of self vanished. Straightway she lifted her bowed head, and in a clear penetrating voice she called aloud :

“The Lord hath heard and accepted the vow of Jephthah the son of Gilead.” With the same utter forgetfulness of self, she paid no heed to the dark-visaged men of war that lined either side of the open space before the altar of sacrifice. She sped past them like a flash of light; she swiftly mounted the narrow flight of steps that led to the huge block of cedar-wood, dyed crimson with the life-blood of a score of dumb victims to the rite of sacrifice and burnt-offering. And standing there with her hand resting on the altar, again she raised her voice so that all the vast company might hear, as she said : “I lay my hand on this block of sacrifice in token that I yield myself a willing offering unto Jehovah in fulfillment of Jephthah’s vow.”

And then, as swiftly as she had ascended she descended the steps, and bowed herself low before Jephthah, saying :

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"My father, do to me according to that which has proceeded out of thy mouth, forasmuch as the Lord hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon."

As Elisheba ceased speaking, the emotion that swayed the people was so powerful, that mighty warriors and strong men wept like children and groaned aloud.

But a minute later when Elisheba, with downcast eyes, clasped her father's hand and led him from the judgment hall, all was still as death.

Close following Jephthah and his daughter came Naomi weeping tears such as only fall once in a lifetime. And then came Ozem pale as one just risen from the grave, and looking like one who would never smile again. Nevertheless, Ozem's step was firm; there was no time to waste in lamentations. Before the morrow's sun rose over the eastern hills Elisheba must be wending her solitary way toward the lepers' village, and much remained to be said before that sad dawning.

As the sorrowful group passed through the outer court, thronged by a weeping crowd, sympathy was expressed by mute



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deed and look. Elisheba had so won their respect by her gentle dignity ; their love by her submission ; their pity by her sorrow. But no word could they utter to comfort this grief—it was a sorrow beyond words !

And yet, Elisheba understood ; she felt the sympathy of silence ; she even tried to smile as she bowed in acknowledgment of the tender, kindly feeling written on every face.

When they neared home Elisheba bade Naomi and Ozem go on in advance. She wanted to be alone with her father. She knew his proud reserved nature and the restraint Naomi and Ozem's presence imposed on the free expression of his anguish, and she yearned to comfort him ; she wanted him to say his misery out before they parted forever. But even when alone with his daughter, Jephthah's grief found no utterance. He could only repeat the heart-broken plea, "Forgive, forgive." At every repetition of the words, Elisheba softly answered : "Father, I forgive !"

At last they came to their home ; the door was wide open ; Naomi had already kindled a fire of dry sticks. Ozem stood

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on the steps awaiting them; the background of fire-light sharply defining his tall, manly figure.

As Elisheba saw him thus her slight frame shook as though she had been met by a blast of chill north wind, and she bowed her head on her father's arm, she hid her face in the folds of his rough abá.

But as Ozem sprang to her side she lifted her head and looked up at him, with eyes that shone, while the color mounted to her pale cheeks and flushed her marble-white brow. And yet she gently repulsed him; but as she did it, she whispered a promise of the farewell to be uttered later.

And then father and daughter entered the house where all was silent as night, except for the sound of the crackling fire, and Naomi's smothered sobs which she tried in vain to hush.

## CHAPTER XXXII.

### ELISHEBA AND OZEM.

ONE hour, then half an hour passed before Elisheba sought the olive tree beneath which she had promised to meet Ozem. And yet, although every moment was dear and precious, and there was much to say, Elisheba waited and wondered why Ozem did not come. She did not know of the fierce conflict that tore his heart as he strove to gain calmness for that hour. It grew dark while Elisheba waited and, as she stood alone amid the deepening shadows, the new conditions of her life seemed to close in about her. For the first time that day she wept. But weeping brought no respite from the dull consciousness of her position. In her effort to regain composure she sank on her knees in prayer. And she was still kneeling when at last Ozem joined her. He was startled by her appearance. She had put off the white robe, and resumed the ashen-hued sack-

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cloth skirt and mantle, the folds of which were wrapped around her. Her long hair hung in sable masses about her face, and by contrast increased the pallor of her countenance, and the dark circles around her eyes, from which now, that her tears had spent their force, the sorrow of her heart, looked out with a pleading expression of mingled wonder, awe, and grief.

But, as Elisheba met Ozem's earnest gaze, love worked its own miracle, and the beauty, which as she wept had seemed forever eclipsed, came back, and again—as in the hour after her return home—for a brief time the misery and the parting were forgotten—the present was all.

Thus the moments slipped by, and Ozem and Elisheba were unconscious of their flight.

As is the way with those who love, they repeated what they had said before, finding with each repetition some new sweetness in the words, some new sympathy. But when Ozem put his arm about her, and took her hand as though to caress it, instantly Elisheba remembered that she was there to bid him a last farewell.

The thought pierced her heart with an-

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guish. And yet, as she moved aside and stood a little apart, her manner was calm, and her voice did not tremble as she spoke words of counsel and cheer that inspired Ozem with fresh courage to suffer and be strong. Indeed they both felt the up-lifting influence of what Elisheba said.

Like Moses—the High Priest of their nation—they stood that hour before the “burning bush” of Jehovah’s revealed truth, and even as their souls were tried with fire, they knew it was the consuming fire of God’s Love, that purifies, but never destroys.

It was only a foreshadowing of the “Light of the World,” that Ozem and Elisheba recognized.

The Star had not risen in the East. They belonged to the early ages of time, and in the history of humanity and of nature the record has ever been the same, “Evening and Morning were the first day.” Evening first, and then Morning—Darkness, and then Light !

As Elisheba ceased speaking, Ozem answered by words equally brave and true. And then—the time had come when they must part, never again to know the joy of

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earthly meeting. They must henceforth walk apart until the end. The sun would run its orbit and the moon her course, seed-time and harvest would return to the sunny land of Gilead, but for Ozem and Elisheba, as long as earthly life lasted, there would never be another meeting—never. Afterward—thank God earth's afterward is Heaven.

For one long moment Elisheba's eyes were lifted to Ozem's, for one moment "she pressed her lips with slow solemnity upon his brow." And then—silently, swiftly, she passed from Ozem's sight.

All through the long hours of the night Ozem never stirred from the place where Elisheba left him. Clouds gathered and rain fell, but he did not feel it. The wind blew and thunder rolled and echoed far and long, but he did not hear it.

When morning came life began again. Life—that looked so long, so terrible a task to the Hebrew youth.

And yet—life was worth living; work remained, and duty. And, renouncing self and earthly joy, he turned to the Eternal

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Lord, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and  
Jacob. And turning,

“He saw a full-arched firmament.”

Yes, life was worth living, although  
earth's joy be dead.

## CHAPTER XXXIII.

### TWO FAREWELLS.

NAOMI was the first to greet Elisheba after her parting from Ozem. And Naomi had loved the damsel all the days of her life, as a mother loves a child. The two women had brief time for words. Already the short summer night had begun. At dawn Elisheba must go.

After the farewell to Naomi Elisheba hastened to her father. At the sound of her light swift footstep, Jephthah moaned like one in mortal pain, and then she was by his side, her head rested on his shoulder; they sat together hand-in-hand as of old, and the night waned.

As the gray light of dawn stole through the open casement, Elisheba rose and went toward the door. But before she crossed the threshold her father folded her in his arms, he pressed upon her pale brow, her tender mouth, and her dear eyes, the last kiss. And with "one blind cry of anguish, of passion and of pain," he loosened his clasp—he let her go.



## L'ENVOI.

### I.

HERE endeth the story of Jephthah and his daughter. Whether death came soon, or whether for long years Elish-eba bore her mortal lot as martyrs bore their flames, we know not. But this we know, her soul had learned not Israel's creed alone that "God is one, that God is great."

She also knew the God whose name is Love, "God the compassionate, the merciful."

### II.

"And it was a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah, the Gileadite, four days in a year."

### III.

And it came to pass during all the years of the life of Naomi, of the tribe of Benjamin, every day at morning and at night, she looked toward the far-off hills of Moab, watching as though to see the faint flutter

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of a maiden's robe, as she had done on the day of Elisheba's departure. But for all her watching she saw naught. Elisheba never came back. Naomi could only remember the slight figure toiling up the steep mountain-side in the early light of the day, just as the morning broke rosy on cliff and spur. And how, when Elisheba reached the distant height, she became a speck against the blue horizon, until at last she seemed to pass into the azure sky.

### IV.

Down to the time of old age, ever and anon through the broad land of Gilead, from the border of the Jordan, through the hill-country, Ozem, the prophet, came and went. He was clad in raiment of roughest texture, worn and bearing many stains of travel. In his hand he bore a staff and underneath his arm he carried the Book of the Law. And often he read aloud in a solemn voice words that thrilled the hearts of those who heard, with their promise of a "Messiah, mighty to save," who should be called "Jehovah Righteousness." Some there were who listened to Ozem who counted his hopes as wild and aimless, and to some

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his voice was as the voice of an angel.  
And listening and believing, they received  
power to press on unwavering to the Eternal Home.

Thus it was that Ozem lived to teach

"A man is not as God  
But then most God-like being most a man."

### V.

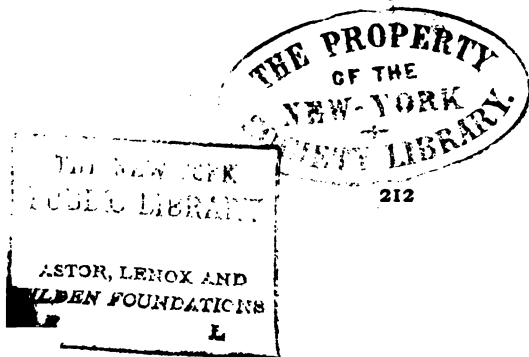
"And Jephthah, the son of Gilead, judged  
Israel six years; then died Jephthah, the  
Gileadite, and was buried in one of the  
cities of Gilead."

"Was despair the end of all his woe?  
Far-off the angel voices answer, No!  
Devils despair, for they believe and tremble,  
But man believes and *Hopes*."

And Jephthah believed.

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"Midnight is past,  
The cross begins to bend!"



“When faith is ripe for sight—why, reasonably,  
then  
Comes the great clearing-up.”

—ROBERT BROWNING.







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